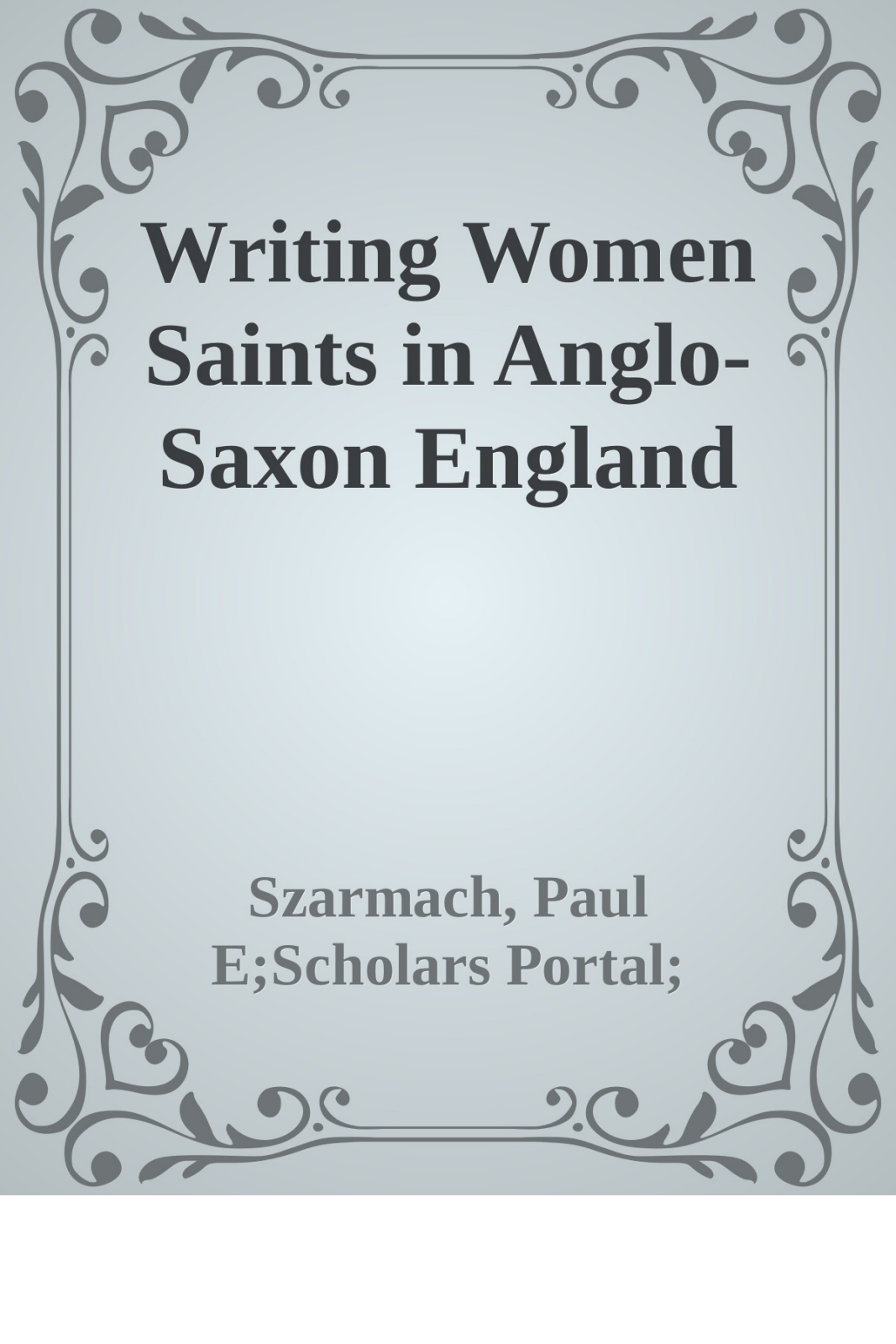


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Writing Women Saints in Anglo- Saxon England

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WRITING WOMEN SAINTS IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND



EDITED BY PAUL E. SZARMACH

WRITING WOMEN SAINTS IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England

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50 ANS DE SOUTIEN DU GOUVERNEMENT DE L'ONTARIO AUX ARTS

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For Katherine

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~~AS~~*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

~~ASE~~*Anglo-Saxon England* [cited as a periodical by volume and year]

~~ASPR~~*Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie

~~BHL~~*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*

British Library, London [in citations of manuscripts]

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris [in citations of manuscripts]

Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon, by Neil R. Ker

~~CH~~*Chic's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, ed. Peter Clemoes

~~CH~~*Chic's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. Malcolm Godden

~~CH~~*Chic's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, ed. Malcolm Godden

~~CC~~Cambridge, Corpus Christi College [in citations of manuscripts]

~~CCM~~*Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis*

~~CSL~~*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* [cited by volume]

~~CS~~*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [cited by volume]

Cambridge, University Library [in citations of manuscripts]

~~EMF~~*English Manuscripts in Facsimile*

~~ETS~~*English Text Society* [cited in the various series: OS, Original Series; ES, Extra Series; SS, Supplementary Series]

~~EME~~*English Medieval Europe*

Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts, by Helmut Gneuss

~~HBS~~*Henry Bradshaw Society*

~~HE~~*Hele, Ecclesiastical History of the English People* [*Historia Ecclesiastica*; cited by book, chapter, and page]

~~HMY~~*Men and Holy Women*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach

~~ES~~*Esfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. Walter W. Skeat [cited by number of the work, line, and page]

~~MGH~~*Monumenta Germaniae Historica* [cited by subseries and volume]

~~OM~~*Old English Martyrology*

~~PL~~*Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne [cited by volume and column]

WRITING WOMEN SAINTS IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Introduction

The twelve essays in this collection occupy an important place in the contemporary study of women saints of Anglo-Saxon England, a field that continues to define itself and to move rapidly in many different directions, challenging received wisdom such as it is and offering alternative methodologies. This area of study has not yet reached the moment when it could achieve some sort of synthesis or consensus that would constitute a common view. One should never expect unanimity in academic discourse and to expect it from an area of study barely a half-generation old is too much to ask. There is, then, a multiplicity of themes, ideas, and issues still occupying attention, creating a certain vibrancy that almost guarantees that women saints will remain a sub-field of intellectual excitement for the foreseeable future. Within the continuing discussion this collection concentrates on four major areas or topics, as will be described below in greater detail. One overarching theme is the positive creative tension that through contrast demonstrates the fruitfulness between methods. Thus, Christine Rauer and Jacqueline Stodnick take two different routes to cast new light on a much neglected text, the *Old English Martyrology*; Rhonda McDaniel and Renée Trilling use traditional methodology and new theory, respectively, in studies of virgin martyrs; and the McDaniel-Trilling discussion contrasts with that of John Black and Virginia Blanton, who consider *almae matres*, not virgin martyrs. The multiplicity of topics includes the idea of genre in its various flexible manifestations and in the necessary bilingual nature of genre. In one sense virtually every chapter can be seen to be about genre. The major section of the collection is the exploration of genre and how Anglo-Saxon writers were no slavish imitators of generic possibilities. Any given chapter can be seen to be the intersection of two or more topical areas. Finding point and counterpoint in this volume is the best way to read it.

The first thematic focuses on perhaps the earliest prose piece in the canon, the *Old English Martyrology (OEM)*, a text that despite its importance has seen comparatively few interpreters. As already noted, Christine Rauer and Jacqueline Stodnick consider this foundational work from two contrasting, if not complementary, positions. Rauer, who is preparing a new edition of the *OEM*, examines and contextualizes special features in those sections of the *OEM* focusing on female saints. The *OEM* holds a key position in the middle of the Anglo-

Saxon period, mediating between the earlier period of Aldhelm and Bede and that of late Anglo-Saxon England. Evidence from the *OEM* can explain the later survival of older traditions, anticipating cults that were to develop much later in English hagiography, as well as show the last traces of disappearing English cults. For example, the *OEM* seems to juxtapose what must have been quite recent “modern” hagiographical narratives (as in the case of Afra or Mary Magdalen) with more ancient and possibly obsolete material. Several other treatments of female saints in this text, for example, those of Æthelthryth and Hild, also hint at material and cults that are not otherwise well known and are thought to have flourished much later, clearly testifying to the importance of this text. Furthermore, the *OEM* seems to present some unusual lexical descriptions of female monastic houses. These, together with the more recent hagiographical sources used by the author, seem to testify to a lively interest in female hagiography in the ninth century, a time that is often regarded as textually not very productive. Rauer shows that the female entries in the *OEM* not only are proportionally comparable to male entries, but often also provide important clues about quite central issues, such as the date of composition and the author’s working methods. If Rauer thus shows the fruitfulness of traditional, philological methods, Stodnick demonstrates how the *OEM* can be at home in contemporary theory, as she describes the “complex relations” of gender, body, and place. The *OEM* contains paradigmatic episodes that suggest an intimate and natural connection between the male saint and the landscape. The male saint’s body is threatened with fragmentation, only to be brought back together through the medium of place: dismembered limbs, for instance, come together and are rendered whole in burial. In entries for female saints the focus is on living bodies just before the moment of death rather than the fate of their dead bodies and their performance of post-mortem miracles. The difference is the function of the varying role of the body, which in the lives of female saints provides the route to sainthood itself. The living body of the female virgin martyr is more important than the description of posthumous miracles.

The second section describes variations on the theme of genre. Tracey-Anne Cooper follows the injunction “back to the manuscripts,” which has been part of the resurgence of manuscript work in Anglo-Saxon literary studies. Cooper sets the context for the Life of Margaret, which appears in the compendious Cotton Tiberius A.iii, a major manuscript including monastic rules, homilies, liturgical texts, confessional texts, prognostics, and scientific treatises, among other things. She examines the Life within this manuscript context and

establishes its function based on the relationships with the other texts in the manuscript. The homilies preceding the Life present a simple catechism for the laity and the Life itself becomes an example of the virtues in this catechism. At the same time the religious community of Christ Church, Canterbury, could take example too from the Life. As a text that shows simplification of the source, yet retains complex layers of allusion to the Bible and to the Gospel of Nicodemus, Cotton Tiberius A.iii art. 15 could be understood by both lay and clerical audiences. Thus, the Life of Margaret plays a key role in the *mentalité* that sets the strategy of the whole manuscript and in this case shows a surprising use of genre for a particular purpose. Mary Louise Fellows suggests a new way to conceptualize saints' lives by challenging the gender line between holy men and holy women and by considering wills as related to the spiritual literature of the period. She explores the spiritual understanding of gender by looking at Ælfric's Life of Martin in *Lives of Saints* and his Life of Eugenia. Fellows applies the results of this comparison to the will of Æthelgifu, a wealthy widow. The gender analysis shows the strong connection between the Anglo-Saxon will and spirituality. Æthelgifu's will becomes, in effect, a self-published saint's life in which she documents a life devoted to *imitatio Christi*. Rebecca Stephenson develops Ælfrician themes as they relate to tradition and orthodoxy. Like Cooper and Fellows, Stephenson studies the broader context for saints' lives in the late tenth and the eleventh centuries. Stephenson describes Ælfric's Homily on the Assumption (First Series), wherein his treatment of Mary is "both idiosyncratic and highly traditional." Ælfric is idiosyncratic because he deviates from his contemporaries in rejecting apocryphal accounts of the Assumption narrative found in the Blickling Homilies and the iconography of the *Benedictional of St. Æthelwold*, the latter produced at Winchester, where Ælfric himself was educated. Yet Ælfric introduces a fanciful miracle from the Life of Basil in which the deceased St Mercurius rises to kill Julian the Apostate through Mary's intervention. Why he included this "miracle" yet rejected others seems unfathomable. While Ælfric's treatment of Marian material could be seen as innovative, he presents himself as a strictly traditional figure who upholds church teachings. Most of the features of the homily considered most characteristically Ælfrician (and most at odds with his contemporaries) are translated directly from his source text. Stephenson effectively argues that where Ælfric is the most innovative, he is also the most traditional.

With an allusion to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in the titles, Robin Norris and I develop complementary discussions of subgenre and inverted genre. Norris reads the anonymous Life of Euphrosyne, a transvestite saint like Ælfric's Eugenia, but, as Norris argues, these two

holy women represent two distinct hagiographical subgenres: Eugenia a *passio*, Euphrosyne a *vita*. The three laments for Euphrosyne, cried by Paphnuntius, Euphrosyne's father (who mistakenly believes his daughter dead), confirm the subgenre of *vita*. Female saints who die of natural causes are rare within the extant corpus of Old English hagiography, yet in its interest in queer sexuality and the transgression of gender boundaries, current scholarship has defeminized Euphrosyne, whose female identity is hidden and revealed, but not effaced. The most remarkable feature of Euphrosyne's life may be not her cross-dressing, but her death by natural causes. In my essay on Mary of Egypt, the repentant harlot, I describe several narrative moves that, bold if not brilliant, constitute a moral strategy perhaps risky in its adoption but reflective of an authorial confidence: there is a lot of sex in a story finally not about sex. The compiler of London, BL Cotton Julius E.vii, who essentially ignored Ælfric's wishes concerning the integrity of the authorial collection, had to see the moral utility of the Life of Mary of Egypt and the importance of the Life for a deeper understanding of monastic possibilities. The external evidence provided by Julius E.vii, the manuscript context, tells much, but the inversion of the generic features of virgin martyr stories gives this Life a special status among female saints' lives. The narrative theme "the woman teaches," set in a context where the virgin Cecilia and the apocryphal figure Thecla can be points of comparison, has a special impact when the student is apparently the near morally perfect Zosimus. One clear generic inversion involves the grotesquerie of Mary's over-sunburnt body, her nudity, and the awkwardness of her burial. Mary is a distance from the beautiful virgin martyrs and the courtly ladies of the later Middle Ages. All in all, it is a simplification to label the Life of Mary of Egypt as a "repentant harlot" in the face of its generic complexity, which requires an adjustment of our "horizon of expectations."

John R. Black and Virginia Blanton focus, respectively, on Ely monastery's two saintly sisters, Æthelthryth and Seaxburh, the former being one of the three major saints from the Anglo-Saxon past, according to the twelfth-century Reginald of Durham.¹ Black outlines the emphasis in the development of Æthelthryth's saintliness from virginity (an emphasis that is perhaps a reflex of her barrenness) to her chastity, to spiritual steadfastness, and to the fruits of these virtues. Æthelthryth comes to be a type of *alma mater* for a long and flourishing line of saintly "offspring." This substantive and somewhat paradoxical shift in emphasis, from virginity and sexual constraint to steadfastness and generative spirituality, not only assists in the flowering of Æthelthryth's cult, but does so in ways that work to elide distinctions in gender, place, and time that might otherwise have limited the cult's

appeal. Blanton turns to Goscelin of Saint-Bertin to continue the story of Ely into the early Norman period. Goscelin wrote lections for the feast of Seaxburh that suggest Ely's investment in the cult of the founder's sister. The lections open with appositives that demonstrate Seaxburh's familial roles, yet it is the presentation of this Kentish queen as *omnium mater* that deserves investigation, for here Goscelin assigns Seaxburh the place of founding mother of Kent. Blanton studies how Goscelin developed his presentation from older sources and places it in the context of other cult-building activities at Ely in the eleventh century. The significance of the cult of Seaxburh lies in Goscelin's ability to frame Seaxburh as a generative figure, one that provides the genealogical link between the multiple Ely virgin saints

The final section of this collection offers three essays on virgin martyr stories that contrast with the accounts of Æthelthryth and Seaxburh. Rhonda McDaniel traces the theological ideas argued by Ambrose of Milan in his *De virginibus*, and briefly illustrated there in the story of Agnes through the Pseudo-Ambrosian *Passio S. Agnetis*, which presents the ideas for both instruction and devotion in the Anglo-Latin and Anglo-Saxon versions of her legend. Ambrose's work apparently was not known in Anglo-Saxon England, but the Pseudo-Ambrosian *passio*, falsely attributed to Ambrose, was. Ambrose's ideas concerning gender, virginity, and sanctity find their expression in later works, notably Aldhelm in his prose and poetic *De virginitate*, Ælfric in his *Lives of Saints*, and Bede, the probable author of the hymn *In Natali S. Agnetis*, which was adapted for the instruction and encouragement of diverse audiences. Renée Trilling engages the paradoxes of female martyrdom in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, where violence, sex, and spectacle reinforce ideas of peace, chastity, and virtue. The spectacle of a broken, bleeding, and defiled body and the audience's experience of that pleasure would seem to be at odds with religious enlightenment. Indeed, the emphasis on the body, in a discourse where the body is aligned with all that is fallen, temporal, and damnable, might prove morally dangerous. Whereas others may see the body as a metaphorical text in need of spiritual exegesis, in hagiographic narratives Trilling sees the bodies, particularly the female bodies, as being objectified, sexualized, defiled, and appropriated for and by the audience. By emphasizing the materiality of female virgin martyrs, Ælfric engages with the eroticism that underwrites narratives of martyrdom, refiguring the female body as a conduit for spiritual relations between Ælfric's male readers and their equally masculine God. By contrast, the prolific Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, who wrote about some twenty Anglo-Saxon saints, nearly half of them women, offers a variation on the virgin martyr story. Strictly speaking, none of Goscelin's women saints

experiences martyrdom, but all must confront “virginity under threat,” as if Goscelin felt such a confrontation necessary to a woman’s sanctity. In her title Rosalind Love cites the rhetorical pyrotechnics of Mildred of Thanet, who refuses to be coerced into marriage. Love argues against the view that Goscelin could only write about women as martyred virgins by examining how Goscelin constructed scenes in the *Lives* of Mildred, Amelberga, Wulfhild, and Mildburh. Love concludes that Goscelin’s model for female sanctity is slightly different from the virginal martyr figure, for he embraces an enthusiasm for anachoresis and affective spiritual reflection. One could say that Goscelin, who emerges as a major writer in this collection, writes through the genre to another form.

From the foregoing review of the structure and contents of the collection it should be clear that the editorial philosophy aims to organize inclusivity of method and approach around key themes in the study of female saints. Neither the volume as a whole, nor ultimately any of the individual chapters, focuses on any narrow topic. The topics include the idea of genre in its various forms and versions, the necessary bilingual nature of genre, the importance of manuscript evidence for the meaning of holy lives, the fruitfulness of contemporary approaches, the continuing role of traditional philology, and, of course, gender studies in their many possible perspectives. As I have already suggested, any given chapter can be seen to be the intersection of two or more of these topical areas.

This collection began as a project of the Richard Rawlinson Center for Anglo-Saxon Studies and Manuscript Research at the Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, which received support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Division of Research and Education, for a Summer Seminar for College and University Teachers, 3 July – 12 August 2006, entitled “Holy Men and Holy Women.” I was principal investigator and seminar director. During seminar discussions and in correspondence thereafter it became clear that there was a core of participants whose scholarly interests could become the foundation of a collection of essays focused on women saints. When I retired from Western Michigan and took up the post of executive director of the Medieval Academy in September 2006, the momentum of the collection slowed measurably. Nevertheless, my colleagues and collaborators remained cheerful as the disruption of the move and new duties made their demands. I am grateful to them for their hard work and their cooperation. I owe a special debt of thanks to Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe for her many suggestions that have improved this volume and for guiding the editor past the Scylla of laptops and the Charybdis of word-processing programs. At a key moment in the process Rosalind

Love came to the aid of the editor, who is thankful and grateful.

The ultimate origin of this collection, along with the NEH seminar, was the successful 1996 volume *Holy Men and Holy Women*. *HMHW*, as it is abbreviated in citations, sought to open up the study of Old English saints' lives by describing the contexts necessary for understanding this most substantial body of early medieval literature and by offering exemplary readings of prose texts, mainly those by Ælfric of Eynsham. *HMHW* was the third in a series of collections seeking to stimulate scholarly and critical interest in OE prose.²

This book, which may be considered the fourth in the prose series, develops one of the major paths that *HMHW* outlines, the study of women saints' lives. The NEH Summer Seminar further defined the subject and the scope of the collection. Six of the twelve contributors to this collection were seminar participants, and two were faculty, while the remaining four authors from outside the seminar had already established their active involvement in the subject area.

Old English Martyrology

1 Female Hagiography in the *Old English Martyrology*

CHRISTINE RAUER

The *Old English Martyrology* (hereafter *OEM*) is one of the most important sources for both male and female hagiography from Anglo-Saxon England.¹ In some 200 prose entries of varying length, the text rehearses the most important details (feast day, birthplace, family relationships, miracle stories, means of death, place of burial) of individual saints' lives and martyrdoms. The entries are arranged according to feast days into a calendrical sequence, and are interspersed with further entries of a non-hagiographical nature.² Probably composed from a wide range of Latin sources in the ninth century, the text provides an insight into an otherwise difficult intermediary period of Anglo-Saxon literary production, linking the earlier era of Aldhelm and Bede with the intensive production of late Anglo-Saxon England, both of which are better documented and understood.³ Because of its composition at a "bottleneck" of Anglo-Saxon text production and text survival, the *OEM* can offer explanations for the later survival of certain hagiographical cults and can also show up the last traces of disappearing early cults. In what follows, I would like to present an introduction to the female hagiography of the *OEM*, surveying the author's treatment of his female saints, which in many ways can be shown to resemble that of his male saints, particularly as far as hagiographical status is concerned: the martyrologist seems just as inclusive in his search for female hagiography as in his selection of male traditions. But I am also hoping to show that, beyond his choice of entries, the martyrologist then makes many conventional distinctions between these two groups of saints, for example, in terms of his vocabulary. Beyond that, it will also be possible to show that some female entries in the *OEM* acquire particular interest for modern students of the text, as they provide important clues regarding the author's source material, working methods, and period of composition.

Differing from other martyrologies in important respects, the text may have been intended (and was apparently also used) as a reference work, perhaps for preachers and authors, although communal ceremonial usage cannot be ruled out.⁴ The text could have been linked to King Alfred's nationwide educational program, as its sanctorale does not seem to reflect any particular local constellation of saints. Instead,

the author seems to have aimed at comprehensive inclusion of all hagiographical traditions available in his ambit (of which more below). His tolerant inclusion of both recent and obsolete material, as well as insular and Continental traditions, also goes hand in hand with an inclusive and even-handed approach to male and female hagiography. Roughly one in four entries focuses on a female saint as its protagonist. The fact that the text favours male saints is partly due to the *de officio* inclusion of figures in ecclesiastic positions which were not open to women: fourteen popes are included in the text, as are eleven of Christ's disciples and a great number of (almost necessarily male) saints involved in the conversion of Europe. In its relative balance between male and female saints the text is comparable to Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*, Ælfric's *LS*, and the collection of saints' lives contained in the ninth-century legendary Paris, BnF, lat. 10861, all of which devote roughly one-third of the text to female protagonists.⁵ The length of individual entries in the *OEM* in any case seems to be independent of the protagonists' gender, and some of the female entries, such as those for Marina (7 July), Lucia (13 Dec.), Pelagia (19 Oct.), and Cecilia (22 Nov.), are among the longest in the text.

The martyrologist tends to follow his numerous Latin sources to the greatest degree, both in narrative content and in wording, and precisely because of this faithfulness it has been possible to trace most of his source material.⁶ Among the few entries that contain unsourced details in the *OEM* is that for Hild (17 Nov.): the description of her entry into heaven contains elements not given in *HE*, which seems to be the source for the rest of the entry. Given that the saint's hagiographical tradition is English, the martyrologist may well have had access to oral material; alternatively (and perhaps more likely, given the author's usual dependence on written sources), he may have had access to written material now lost. James Cross indeed went so far as to postulate an entire lost life for Hild on the basis of this unsourced material.⁷

It is not clear whether the martyrologist, of whom very little is known, was male or female. The author's learning and access to source texts would seem to point to a male author in the first instance, and his wide reading is probably incompatible with what we know about the libraries of female religious houses or the mobility of female monastic personnel in Anglo-Saxon England. Sarah Foot suggested that the martyrologist appears to take particular care with the vocabulary pertaining to such female institutions: "communities of women were distinguished from all male houses in this text in a way not paralleled in other sources: the female houses at Ely and Barking, for example, were each described as *fæmnena mynster*." ⁸

What at first sight looks like a pronounced interest in female monasticism and its terminology unfortunately turns out to be less idiosyncratic and thus less remarkable on closer inspection. The textual passages in question are the entries for Æthelthryth (23 June) and Æthelburg (11 Oct.); the relevant religious houses are Ely and Barking. The entry for Æthelthryth is based on a passage in the *HE*:⁹ Bede explains that the saint established a monastery in which she functioned as the mother of many virgins, “constructo monasterio, uirginum Deo deuotarum perplurium mater uirgo et exemplis uitae caelestis esse coepit et monitis.”¹⁰ The kind of house described by Bede could very well in Old English be described as a *fæmnena mynster* (indeed, the words *monasterium* and *uirgines* are also adjacent in the Latin), and it is difficult to see what other Old English vocabulary could have been chosen here by the martyrologist.¹¹ It is therefore important to note that the idea that Æthelthryth ran a community of virgins, *fæmnena mynster*, is already present in the martyrologist’s source, the *HE*, and perhaps, in view of the Latin wording, should be translated specifically as a “community of virgins.”

The entry for Æthelburg is also based on the *HE*.¹² Here, Bede states that Eorcenwold founded a monastery for his sister Æthelburg in which she was to live as the mother of women devoted to God (“in quo ipsa Deo deuotarum mater ac nutrix posset existere feminarum”).¹³ In this instance, too, the martyrologist’s more concise *fæmna mynster*, “a religious house of virgins” seems the most obvious translation of the Latin source and again reflects the martyrologist’s tendency to restrict himself to the material and phraseology found in his sources, without elaboration and interpretation.

In sum, the entries for both Æthelthryth and Æthelburg demonstrate that, contrary to Foot’s suggestion, the explicit description of Ely and Barking as housing women does occur in sources other than the *OEM*, namely, in the *HE*. It therefore needs to be stressed that the martyrologist’s choice of words is less reflective of a marked interest in female monasticism and its vocabulary, but more of the literal translation technique with which he approaches all of his sources, Bede in particular. Nor could it be said that *fæmnena mynster* was a collocation used more generally by Anglo-Saxon authors as a technical term for Anglo-Saxon nunneries: examples of the phrase are not plentiful and tend to be based on similar Latin phrases referring to communities abroad.¹⁴ Barbara Yorke and also Sarah Foot have emphasized the fluidity of vocabulary applied to English female communities before the late Anglo-Saxon period, and in view of this fluidity it would be difficult to pinpoint instances where any author displays a particular carefulness with this terminology.¹⁵ Indeed,

technical vocabulary referring to female monasticism is actually rare in the *OEM*.¹⁶ In contrast to other ninth-century texts, the *OEM* uses the word *nunne* (“nun,” “woman under vows,” “woman dedicated to God”) only once, namely, in the entry for St Matthew (21 Sept.), where it refers to a virgin who has taken the veil and lives in some sort of early virginal community, albeit not an English one.¹⁷

The generic classification of the *OEM* is not without its problems, since the text not only displays characteristics of the martyrological genre, but also has traits in common with calendars, menologia, legendaries, and collections of encyclopaedic material.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is clear that the vast majority of its hagiographical entries are preoccupied with the saints’ death and martyrdom.¹⁹ Following hagiographical convention, female martyrdom is often gendered: some examples are linked to the women’s rejection of the sexual advances of a pagan suitor; other martyrdoms involve a sexual element as part of the saints’ torture; others derive from an earlier disreputable life in prostitution.²⁰ But the vocabulary applied to female martyrdom in the *OEM* is also markedly different in comparison with that applied to its male saints: although both male and female saints suffer martyrdom (explicitly denoted as such with the Old English term *martyrdom*, describing the deaths of both female and male saints more than fifty times in the *OEM*), only a male saint can be designated with the Old English noun *martyr* in this text. The opening formulas of some two dozen entries for male saints immediately identify them as martyrs, as in the case of Sebastian, for example (20 Jan., “On ðone twentigþan dæg ðæs monðes bið Sancte Sebastianes tid þæs æþelan martyres”).²¹ But no entry applies the Old English word *martyr* to an individual female saint; the three sole instances in which *martyr* is extended to include females involve mixed groups of saints: Victor and Corona (15 May, “On ðone feowerdeogðan dæg þæs monðes bið þara haligra martyra ðrowung Sancte Uictores ond Sancte Coronan”); the Machabees (1 Aug., “On þone ærestan dæg þæs monþes biþ ðara martyra tid þe we nemnaþ Machabeos; þæt wæron .vii. gebroþor ond heora modor”); and the group known as All Saints (1 Nov., “Eallum Cristes martyrum”). The Old English *martyr* is a late loan word of masculine gender, for which a feminine counterpart never seems to have been coined in Old English, and the masculine gender of this noun explains at least some of the martyrologist’s reluctance to apply this word to a female saint.²² It is important to note that this imbalance in the use of *martyr* is in line with similar usage by other authors, although not all seem to have been as consistent as the martyrologist. Various Anglo-Saxon authors also applied the Old English masculine word to female martyrs, although not with great frequency. Ælfric, for

example, describes Agnes as *þines mæran martyres* (translating the “tuæ martyris Agne” of his probable source).²³ The author of the Old English Bede similarly presents *þære halgan fæmnan and martires Sancte Cecilia* (apparently in translation of “sanctae martyris Ceciliae” in *HE*).²⁴ It is interesting that both these cases seem to have been triggered by Latin sources that applied the Latin word *martyr* in a female context. In Latin, too, usage of the word is overwhelmingly male, although more female examples could be cited than in the case of the Old English term; Tertullian famously refers to Perpetua as a “fortissima martyr,” for example.²⁵ Aldhelm altogether avoids using *martyr* for individual females saints; to solve the problem, he resorts to using the rare feminine form *martira* for three of his female saints, although significantly only in poetry.²⁶ The related Old English noun *þrowere* (“sufferer,” “martyr”) has an attested feminine equivalent, *þrowestre*, which survives, however, in only one example, where it glosses the Latin *martyr* in a Prayer to St Cecilia.²⁷ The Old English *cyþere* (“witness,” “martyr”), on the other hand, seems to have been applied to males only and lacks altogether a feminine cognate.²⁸ The picture that emerges is that the usage of Latin and Old English words for “martyr” is predominantly male. It needs to be stressed that the martyrologist’s reluctance to use the Old English word *martyr*, of masculine gender, for his female saints seems to be in line with the practice of other Anglo-Saxon and Continental authors, all of whom were faced with the difficulty that female martyrdom had no dedicated vocabulary for a female martyr. The martyrologist (who is likely to have known the *HE*, for example) should have known that Latin occasionally does denote a female saint with the Latin noun *martyr*, but chose to be more consistent in his usage, inspired probably not by misogynist sentiments, but more by a sense of what constitutes normal Latin usage and by his usual adherence to his source passages.

Male saints who are not identified as martyrs in the opening formula are frequently designated by their ecclesiastical office or status (*papa*, *biscep*, *arcediacon*, *diacon*, *mæssepreost*, *munuc*, etc.), another area of terminology which is largely inapplicable to female saints. And as shown, as a rule, females are not described with the Old English word *martyr*. This leaves the martyrologist only a few options for the opening formula for his entries on individual female saints, of which there are some forty in the *OEM*. Of those, the vast majority refer to the saint as *fæmne* (“virgin”) in their opening formula, either as *þære halgan fæmnan* (nine cases), exceptionally *þære cynelican fæmnan* (one case) or *þære miclan fæmnan* (one case), but very often also simply as *þære fæmnan* (eight cases) without any qualifying adjective. In only very few cases can the martyrologist point to any other status in his opening

formula: *widuwe* (“widow,” three cases), *abbodesse* (“abbess,” two cases), *cwen* (“queen,” two cases), *gesipwif* (“lady,” one case), *wif* (“woman,” one case). Two entries for prostitute saints Afra (8 Aug.) and Mary Magdalen (22 July) are interesting in that they are forced to deviate from the formulaic norm, not referring to the saints with any kind of noun in the usual opening formula, but launching straightaway into the narrative.

In the main body of a saint’s entry, following a given opening formula, the martyrologist is by contrast often careful to translate Latin descriptions of females in a precise manner, often resorting to Old English terms, which must have been quite rare in literature, or which are otherwise attested only in glossaries, or which he seems to have coined himself. As examples could be cited his use of *byren* (Columba, 31 Dec., “female bear,” translating Latin “*ursa*,” an Old English word otherwise attested only in glossaries); *sealticge* (The Death of St John the Baptist, 29 Aug., “female dancer,” ?*hapax legomenon*); *dryicge* (Agnes, 21 Jan., “sorceress,” with one other, homiletic, attestation, translating the Latin *maga*); *scinlæce* (Agnes, 21 Jan., “female witch,” with only a few other attestations in the feminine form, translating the Latin *sacrilega*); *scericge* (Pelagia, 19 Oct., “actress,” ?*hapax legomenon*, translating *mima*); *synnicge* (Mary Magdalen, 22 July, “female sinner,” ? *hapax legomenon*).²⁹ It is noteworthy that many of these more specific terms seem to have negative connotations, in both the *OEM* and its source texts.

The martyrologist’s extreme faithfulness to his source passages, sometimes at the expense of important information found elsewhere in his source texts, has led to some misunderstandings: Cross attributed to the martyrologist a misinterpretation of Barking as an all-female house (when historically it clearly was a double house). But in this instance, too, it needs to be stressed that the martyrologist merely adheres to his chosen source passage and never comments on the nature of the house. The particular passages from the *HE* used as source material mention only female personnel, who for this reason reappear in the Old English text, whereas the episode in which a brother is mentioned by Bede (and the double nature of the house becomes apparent in the *HE*) is not used for the composition of the *OEM*.³⁰ It does not follow that the martyrologist was not aware that Barking also housed male personnel; he simply does not comment on it in his entry for Æthelburg, since the narrative content of this entry and its sources focus on other matters.

Another case where the martyrologist’s detail could easily be misunderstood as erroneous is the feast of the three sisters Agape, Chionia (jointly 3 Apr.), and Irene (5 Apr.), which, as Michael Lapidge

suggests, should more logically be celebrated on the same day.³¹ But close comparison with a range of possible sources for these entries shows that many other texts assign separate feasts to Agape and Chionia on the one hand and Irene on the other, because of their staggered martyrdom, which is clearly explained in the saints' *passio*.³² For Agape and Chionia, this day varies between 1, 2, and 3 April; as Quentin has pointed out, particularly later texts, and particularly those of the martyrological genre, settle for 3 April; even the martyrologist's main source, the *Passio S. Anastasiae* (*BHL*, 118) variously presents 2 or 3 April for the feast of Agape and Chionia.³³ There is therefore no need to ascribe to the martyrologist a misunderstanding of his source.

Similarly, the family group of saints known as Felicity and her Seven Sons is split over two entries in the *OEM*, one for the sons (10 July) and one for Felicity (23 Nov.), a duplication which has also been interpreted as erroneous.³⁴ But comparison with the source text again shows that the separation of the two feasts is widespread from the earliest beginnings of the legend and probably is not due to a single Anglo-Saxon author.³⁵ Moreover, the *OEM* rationalizes the two entries by clearly marking one feast as that of the sons and the other as that of the mother, as also happens precisely in the sources for these entries. Again, the martyrologist is here following his source material and is careful not to add entries randomly. Indeed, given its length and the quantity of the data contained in it, it is remarkable how few errors in the *OEM* can be traced to the martyrologist himself.³⁶

One such possible misunderstanding concerns the entry for Anastasia (25 Dec.), who is described as leaving her sixty-day imprisonment looking fairer than ever (“þa wæs hire ansin swa reod and swa fæiger”). I have elsewhere suggested that this reference to her “red” (“pink and healthy-looking”) face has no equivalent in the source text, the *Passio S. Anastasiae* (*BHL*, 401), which instead comments on the saint looking “robustiorē,” and that the mistake seems to be based on a confusion of *robur* and *rubor* (or its cognates).³⁷ There seem to be no copies of the Latin source text which already present this confusion, however, and the possibility therefore remains that it was indeed the martyrologist himself who misunderstood the relevant word in a correctly copied Latin exemplar.³⁸ It is in any case interesting that the misunderstanding attributes beauty rather than strength to Anastasia. In other words, it may have been the martyrologist's Latinity that could have led to the translation error in the first place, but it would then have been cultural preconditioning which would have prevented the martyrologist or his readers from spotting the error, as an attractively pink face in a stressed female saint could have been perceived as a plausible and positive reaction to sixty days of incarceration.

If it proves difficult to assess the martyrologist's personal interest in women on the basis of his phraseology (which with the greatest regularity is that of his source passages), more information can perhaps be gleaned from his selections of saints and their hagiographical material. What evidence there is suggests an inclusive approach that favoured the selection of as many saints as possible, probably guided by the availability of narrative material, but in any case irrespective of the presence or absence of a meaningful liturgical cult in Anglo-Saxon England. This again makes it difficult to identify personal preferences. But the *OEM* nonetheless can provide a snapshot of what texts relating to female hagiography were available to its author at the time of composition. His range is impressive: the author seems to juxtapose what must have been more ancient and possibly obsolete material with relatively recent, "modern" hagiographical texts, as in the case of Afra (8 Aug.) or possibly also Mary Magdalen (22 July).

Several of these more recent traditions could even be of assistance in the dating of the composition of the *OEM*. We know that the text must have been in existence by the late ninth century at the latest, since such a *terminus ante quem* is provided by the earliest two manuscripts, London, BL, Add. 23211, fol. 2 (ca. 871x899, Wessex) and London, BL, Add. 40165 A.2, fols 6–7 (s. ix^{ex} or ix/x). A *terminus post quem* has proved more difficult to establish. The latest datable historical events included in the text are the deaths of a number of eighth-century saints: Omer (8 Sept., d. c. 670), Bertinus (5 Sept., d. 709), Winnocus (6 Nov., d. ?717), and John of Beverley (7 May, d. 721).³⁹ It is clear that the texts describing these deaths, which the martyrologist used as sources, constitute important evidence for the dating of the *OEM*. The entry for John of Beverley is almost entirely based on *HE*, completed c. 731. The lives, deaths, and miracles of the first three of these saints are described in the composite *Vitae SS. Audomari, Bertini et Winnoci* (*BHL*, 763, 8952), probably written by a single author in the late eighth or even early ninth century.⁴⁰ This text was used as a source by the martyrologist for the three quite extensive entries for these saints.⁴¹ The entry for Omer (20 lines long) describes the pleasant smell after his death, his burial at Saint-Omer, and a posthumous miracle in which a villain perjures himself at the saint's church and is punished with his life. The entry for Bertinus (16 lines) recounts how the saint cures an injured nobleman, the saint's burial at Saint-Omer, and the posthumous miracle of the man who goes fishing on a Sunday, is struck deaf and then cured again at the saint's church. The 24-line entry for Winnocus describes the humble labour taken on by this abbot at Wormhout, the miraculous multiplication of flour at the monastery's corn mill, and the punishment of the curious onlooker who is struck blind and is cured

again by the saint.

It was Günter Kotzor who first pointed out the importance of this relatively late source for the dating of the *OEM*, which would seem to bring the composition of the *OEM* forward to the late eighth or early ninth century at the earliest.⁴² It is true that, as the *Vitae SS. Audomari, Bertini et Winnoci* are anonymous, their date of composition has to be approached with some caution, and that no precise date has been established. But the importance of source texts for the dating of the *OEM* is also exemplified by the entry for All Saints (1 Nov.) and one of its probable sources, the anonymous Carolingian sermon “Legimus in ecclesiasticis historiis.” This homily was dated by Cross to the early ninth century, mainly on account of the perceived interest in the liturgical feast for All Saints around the year 800, but it is noteworthy that one of the text’s manuscripts, Luxembourg Bibliothèque Nationale 264, does seem to point in the same direction, ascribing the sermon to the ninth-century Helisachar of Trier. Thomas Falmagne has recently succeeded in identifying the exemplar of this manuscript as Luxembourg Bibliothèque Nationale 97, a ninth-century book which can be traced to the immediate vicinity of Helisachar, which makes an association between the “Legimus” sermon and this author and a ninth-century date of composition even more likely, with important implications also for the dating of the *OEM*, which borrows narrative material from the sermon.⁴³ Michael Lapidge was right in pointing out the danger of dating the *OEM* by relying on only an individual criterion, seen in isolation. It is therefore interesting to see that other texts, too, seem to point in the same direction, such as the *Vitae SS. Audomari, Bertini et Winnoci*. Moreover, to this relatively late Frankish tradition of Bertinus, Omer, and Winnocus pointed out by Kotzor, one could add the hagiography of several more saints, two of them women and both of them again pointing to the same period of the late eighth or early ninth century: Afra (8 Aug.) and Mary Magdalen (22 July). The *OEM*’s 21-line entry for Afra, which recounts her association with her mother Hilaria and the servants Digna, Eunomia, and Eutropia, her miraculous conversion on witnessing the miracles of Bishop Narcissus, her baptism, her confrontation with Judge Gaius, her execution at the burning stake, and the burial of her unharmed body at Augsburg has to be based on the second *passio* of this saint, the so-called *Conversio et Passio S. Aefrae* (BHL, 108, 109) composed in the late eighth century.⁴⁴

The substantial entry for Mary Magdalen (31 lines) describes the saint as possessed by the devil, her gift of ointment in an alabaster vessel to Christ, her weeping and drying of his feet with her hair, his forgiveness, how Christ appeared to her first among people after his resurrection, the thirty desert years spent in a rock cave, her

nourishment not with food and drink but with heavenly visions, how a mass-priest buries her, and the miracles at her grave. A large part of this entry is based on the *Vita S. Mariae Magdalenae* (BHL, 5453, known as the *Vita Eremitica*), which is currently thought to date from the ninth century.⁴⁵ Cross was even able to identify a particular text variant, the so-called Narrat Iosephus type as the version of text used by the martyrologist.⁴⁶ The dating of the *Vita Eremitica* itself is somewhat in question; various scholars have suspected a link with the *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae* (BHL, 5415), also dated to the ninth century, although the issue deserves further attention.⁴⁷ But whatever the precise dates of the hagiography of Bertinus, Winnocus, Omer, Afra, and Mary Magdalen and the “Legimus” sermon, which are currently thought to date from the later eighth or early ninth century, these texts clearly need to be taken into account in discussions surrounding the date of composition of the *OEM*. (It is frustrating to see that the date of composition of the *OEM*, conversely, also plays a role in the dating of the *Vita S. Mariae Magdalenae*; and it is clear that, at least for that saint, the argument will to some extent remain circular.) In the current state of research, these six texts (and other texts which may represent relatively late sources) seem to point to the same period, namely, the late eighth or early ninth century, as the earliest time when a group of relatively late sources used by the martyrologist would have been in existence, and their sheer number surely must give pause for thought. If one swallow proverbially does not make a summer, six suspected swallows provide more of a clue towards the time of year, and these should not be ignored, especially given other lively bird activity on the horizon. The *OEM* is more than simply a list of saints’ names and matching feasts: it contains substantial amounts of narrative material. This narrative material is necessarily based on literary source texts, which include more than 100 anonymous *passiones* (or text variants thereof), many of them as yet undated, and some conceivably undatable.⁴⁸ For the moment, the hagiography of Omer, Bertinus, and Winnocus discussed by Kotzor, homiletic evidence adduced by Cross, and the hagiography of Afra and Mary Magdalen discussed here would seem to suggest composition of the *OEM* not before the late eighth century, and it is interesting to note that female hagiography is among these relatively “modern” texts used by the martyrologist.⁴⁹

If the martyrologist had access to some relatively recent Continental productions, he clearly also had an interest in what must have been obsolete liturgy. For some eight saints he cites “old sacramentaries” or “older sacramentaries” as his source, although it is remarkable that all these saints are male.⁵⁰ But other entries, many of them for female saints, seem to be detached from Anglo-Saxon liturgical practices of

any period, in the sense that the feasts cited are entirely or very largely absent from surviving Anglo-Saxon calendars. The list is staggering and includes Eugenia (25 Dec), Columba (31 Dec.), Emiliana (5 Jan.), Pega (9 Jan.), Agape and Chionia (3 Apr.), Irene (5 Apr.), the Seven Women at Sirmium (9 Apr.), Alexandria (27 Apr.), Basilla (20 May), Lucia and Auceia (25 June), Zoe (4 July), Anatolia (10 July), Rufina and Secunda (10 July), Symphorosa and her Seven Sons (18 July), Theodota and her Three Sons (2 Aug), Afra (8 Aug), Tryphonia (18 Oct.), Pelagia (19 Oct.), Cyrilla (28 Oct.), and Hild (17 Nov.); many similar male feasts could be added. This long list of saints without any significant presence in Anglo-Saxon calendars is even more striking in view of the fact that the *OEM* remained a popular text throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, at least in the south of England. There is, however, more overlap between this list of rare female saints and Anglo-Saxon litanies.⁵¹ This could be attributed to the idea that litanies, like the *OEM*, but perhaps unlike some calendars, aim to be inclusive of as many saints as possible, without necessarily requiring much knowledge concerning an individual name, although further comparative work on the *OEM* and Anglo-Saxon litanies, which still needs to be undertaken, perhaps would reveal more direct links.

The discrepancy between the sanctorale of the *OEM* and the constellations of saints that feature in surviving liturgical material raises the question as to whether the text lists not saints who were being culted but saints who *were to be* culted, thus supplying biographies for such projected cults. Very few of the named saints' cults however, seem to have gained in popularity in later Anglo-Saxon England. A rare case of a saint who makes an early narrative appearance in the *OEM* and whose cult then increased substantially in late Anglo-Saxon England is that of Mary Magdalen (22 July), although this development cannot be attributed to the martyrologist's influence alone, since it is mirrored by the growing popularity of Mary Magdalen's cult elsewhere in western Europe during the same period. If the ninth-century author's intention, therefore, had been to popularize a number of (male or female) cults, such an effect does not appear to be noticeable in surviving liturgical materials from later Anglo-Saxon England. The fact that late Anglo-Saxon users of the *OEM* were apparently unconcerned by the liturgical detachment of this text matches a similar lack of liturgical prioritizing in the ninth-century author, who clearly did not see liturgical relevance as his main criterion for the inclusion of any given saint. I have elsewhere suggested that the text could have functioned as some sort of crash course in hagiography, a biographical reference work for clerical readers in general and more specifically perhaps for preachers and

authors.⁵² It is interesting that the books commonly linked to the late ninth-century educational reform of King Alfred date from a period at least several centuries in the past: the Psalter, Augustine's *Soliloquia* (completed c. 386–7), Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis* (c. 591) and *Dialogi* (c. 593), Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (c. 524), and possibly also *HE* (c. 731). We know for a fact that this represents a reading list from the ninth century, not one from the time of Bede. After all, there is no reason why an educational program needs to include literature composed right up to the moment of writing. When we apply the same principle to the *OEM* and its elusive date of composition, there seems to be no difficulty in allowing for a substantial gap between the bulk of its sources and the date of composition.

The absence from the *OEM* of saints such as Balthild, Genoveva, Mildred, and Eormenhild could be attributed to the late development of their cults and the concomitant unavailability of relevant hagiographical texts, and the same could be said for Mary of Egypt, whose ninth-century life, the *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae* (*BHL*, 5415) was perhaps composed too late to have been used by the martyrologist.⁵³ That Mary of Egypt could have been excluded on account of her background in prostitution seems less likely, as the *OEM* contains several other entries dedicated to prostitute saints and women with similar lifestyles, such as Afra (8 Aug., “meretrix,” “forlegoswif”), Mary Magdalen (22 July, “synnecge”), and Pelagia (19 Oct., “mima,” “scericege”).⁵⁴ Gordon Whatley, Michael Lapidge, and I have attributed a number of other omissions from the *OEM*, such as those of Agatha, Brigida, Dorothea, Juliana, the Purification of the Virgin Mary, Scholastica, and Victoria, to a textual lacuna from 25 January to 27 February in the transmitted text,⁵⁵ and Lapidge has also pointed to conspicuous gaps in the text for December and considered Candida and Victoria as possible female saints who may once have been included there.⁵⁶ It is useful to speculate on the possible candidates for the February and December lacunae, even though it needs to be remembered at the same time that the martyrologist's criteria for inclusion do not always match those applied to liturgical calendars, which makes it difficult to be quite sure about conspicuous omissions. Similarly, the existence or absence of suitable hagiographical texts does not seem to be a reliable factor for inclusion or exclusion, as numerous entries for saints with no extensive textual tradition show. To some extent, the saints whom the martyrologist had originally chosen for inclusion or exclusion, and the reasons for his choices, ultimately remain unverifiable and difficult to guess at. What is clear, however, is that both male and female hagiography was central to his endeavour, and seems to have operated on a relatively equal level. Paradoxically,

the fact that female saints were not singled out as being of particular interest by the martyrologist demonstrates their importance in the *OEM*.

2 Bodies of Land: The Place of Gender in the *Old English Martyrology*

JACQUELINE STODNICK

That the cult of saints played an important role in organizing the geography of Anglo-Saxon culture, and of the medieval world more generally, is a fact well recognized by scholars. As Clare Lees and Gillian Overing write, for instance, “Getting one’s own saint – and thereby becoming a focus and *locus* for holy relics – not only puts a community on the map but also *creates* that map.”¹ The *praxis* of saintly worship in Anglo-Saxon England, as elsewhere in medieval Europe, was resolutely local, converging upon particular death sites and cult centres. While hagiographical texts had an essential function in creating and disseminating these links between saints and places, such works render their subjects in characteristically and deliberately universal terms even while they work to localize these subjects. Individuals become saints because their actions, as related in hagiographical texts, mark them as belonging to the communal body of Christ, and hagiographers therefore avoided those particular details that would differentiate their material within the genre as a whole. The type of localization performed by the cult of saints thus emerges from a form deeply invested in a similarity that transcends geographical and temporal contexts. And in no type of hagiographical text is this impetus more obvious than in the martyrology, an extensive catalogue bringing together saints from diverse locales and times and organizing them according to the dates of their *dies natalis*. The saints of a martyrology are united by their category of sainthood, which apparently is more important than the contrasting details of their individual backgrounds, even when, as in historical martyrologies, such details are given. Thus, a martyrology would seem to have little to do with generating a notion of local place.

How much a martyrology can be thought of as producing ideas about place, rather than mutely transmitting those of its sources, is connected to the question of whether hagiography is in any sense literary. Many saints’ lives are translations, which has tended to reinforce a sense that the genre passively reflects, or is even entirely distanced from, the concerns of its social context.² Whereas the literary character of hagiography in general is often missed, that of

martyrologies is particularly underemphasized by scholars, who concentrate instead on determining their relationships to sources and the circumstances of their production.³ While what Thomas Hill calls the “art *vitae*” of Anglo-Saxon England (i.e., lengthy texts written about “men and women whose sanctity could simply be taken for granted”) receives gradually increasing attention as literary texts, the shorter and prosaic *legenda* form primarily receives attention only within a text historical or liturgical framework.⁴ Indeed, Hill himself dismisses those saints’ lives contained within large collections, which were perhaps written for public delivery in church, as “relatively brief and straightforward.”⁵ The abbreviated structure and simplified content of such collections, both of which Hill deems were conditioned by the context of their delivery, are seen as “constraints” that render this type of text less interesting and less literary than “the extended Old English saints’ lives – *Elene*, *Juliana*, and the Guthlac poems of the *Exeter Book*.”⁶

However, precisely because martyrologies are large texts consisting of component parts, thinking of them as literary texts requires an approach different from that generally adopted for free-standing hagiographies, works that are lent coherence by their focus on the life and death of a single figure. Coherence is, in a martyrology, a function not of plot but of categorization and of calendar; it resides in the text’s assertion that all its figures became saints in the same way, and that all are united by their position within the repeated cycle of the sanctorale. By definition, a martyrology is less interested in the individual than in the collective, and in this way it magnifies the tendencies of hagiography in general. Although the material of a martyrology is constrained by the ambit of the collection itself, such restriction is not solely or wholly limiting, as it is often viewed by scholars more interested in the apparently greater freedoms of the individual hagiographer. The focus on classification that is inherent in a martyrology, in contrast, causes sets of conceptual associations to surface in the frequent repetition of plot devices across the entries for individual saints. Thus, it is precisely the constraints of these catalogue texts that make them worthy of study, because the rigour itself that the form exerts in shaping the primary material is a powerful conduit for meaning. In this way saints’ lives within collections are doubly inscribed by what I am calling the “catalogic”: the logic, or interpretive frame, suggested by the relation between items in the catalogue. Their inscription is double because not only are items in collections subject to the rather rigid generic requirements of hagiography in general (all *vitae* essentially belonging to a virtual collection of all saints’ lives), but they are also shaped by the mandates of the collection they are in

(which will effectively standardize aspects of the life, such as length, topic, language and imagery).⁷ In this double normativization, collections of saints' lives work to produce and reproduce abstract concepts, and the links between such concepts, through the medium of repeated narrative motifs. Such associations need not be anticipated by the martyrology compiler and may be incidental to his or her main purpose in collecting such diverse material.

This chapter will focus on one particular martyrology text – the vernacular *Old English Martyrology* (OEM) – and one particular set of conceptual associations, those between gender and place. The particular motivating question is how the *Old English Martyrology* contributed to a developing sense of political and territorial unity in the late ninth century, at which time the earliest surviving versions of the text were copied. Since the Anglo-Saxons, throughout their history, lacked general access to the cohesiveness suggested by visual representations of places, texts were particularly important in promoting spatialized modes of thought.⁸ To be sure, medieval *mappae mundi* do not provide a simple model for understanding place outside of the temporal order of narrative, as Martin Foys has most recently demonstrated in his analysis of the eleventh-century Cotton Map.⁹ They do, however, allow for thinking about place as continuous and bounded and thus possessed of a certain type of coherence. This facility becomes particularly significant in representing territorial units that are politically or ethnically configured rather than bounded by water: while Bede writes that “Brittania Oceani insula,” [Britain (is) an island of the ocean], and the Cotton Map shows it to be so, imagining a cohesive and spatial identity for England, on the other hand, is more difficult.¹⁰ By means of repeated narrative motifs, the *Old English Martyrology* provides a means to develop and disseminate precisely such a concept of place as bounded and as intrinsically linked to the history of the people occupying it, allowing for the emergence of a notion of ethnicized place.¹¹ Gender, as I will demonstrate, is an important organizational term in this process, where the treatment of male and female saints suggests different ways to imagine place.

The *Old English Martyrology* is in many ways an innovative text, not least because it is the earliest surviving prose example of a vernacular martyrology in Europe.¹² As a historical martyrology, it expands the record of saints' names and the dates of their *dies natalis*, the bare information usually provided in a martyrology or calendar, with a brief account of their life and death.¹³ But, as Christine Rauer observes, the OEM is more expansive, both within its entries and in the type of material it includes, than other martyrologies.¹⁴ Its over 200 narrative notices for saints and scriptural figures often include more than the

basic details required to establish a figure's identity as a martyr. In addition, the *OEM* begins and ends most months with a calendric observation, which typically makes note of the number of days in each month, its name in both Latin and English, as well as explanations of the name's meaning. These entries significantly diversify the account – linguistically, intellectually, and culturally – interleaving variant notions of temporality alongside the progression of the sanctorale and reminding readers that the reckoning of time is a cultural practice interconnected with language, history, and agriculture. By integrating English and Latin chronological nomenclature, these accounts reproduce the effect of the *OEM*'s saintly catalogue, in which native figures, continental saints, and biblical characters are juxtaposed. As Rauer puts it, the *OEM* is a hybrid, part “martyrology, calendar, legendary, homiliary, and encyclopaedia.”¹⁵ In addition to suggesting how the *OEM* might have been used, the expansive ambit of the collection also allows for connections to be drawn between diverse topics and concepts that might not even enter into the scheme of a more traditional martyrology.

The reach of any conceptual connections established by the *OEM* was likely to be broad, given that the text survives in five main manuscript witnesses that suggest a fairly wide geographical and temporal dispersion during the Anglo-Saxon period.¹⁶ While the earliest manuscripts date to the late ninth century, which sets a firm *terminus ante quem*, a variety of opinions persist as to the precise date and circumstances of the *OEM*'s composition. Central to determining both is the question of whether the vernacular text represents an original composition based on Latin source texts or a wholesale translation of a Latin martyrology. Lapidge has recently argued for the latter, claiming that a Latin original must have existed by the mid-eighth century, of which the *Martyrology* is a translation made at least a century later.¹⁷ Elsewhere in this volume, however, Rauer, like Cross and Kotzor before her, attempts to narrow the temporal range for the *Martyrology*'s composition by securely dating its sources; the combined work of these three scholars points to a period from the late eighth to the early ninth centuries.¹⁸ Given this date range, Rauer does not rule out the possibility that the *Martyrology* was composed as part of Alfred's program of vernacular literacy.¹⁹ As she puts it, “There is after all no reason why an educational programme needs to include literature composed right up to the moment of writing,” which would mean, in turn, that “there seems to be no difficulty in allowing for a substantial gap between the date of the latest sources and the date of composition” of the *Martyrology*.²⁰ If we set aside the thorny issue of its date of composition, what can be stated with security from the manuscript

evidence is that the *Martyrology* was a text that gained significant exposure during a period from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. Whether or not it was a production of the king's court, the earliest manuscript witnesses testify to the existence of an audience for the text during the Alfredian period.

Like most such compilations of saintly material, the gender distribution of the *OEM* is disproportionately masculine: the number of notices given for female saints is a little over a quarter that given for male saints.²¹ The smaller percentage of female entries in saintly compendia resulted from the more restricted routes to sanctity available to women in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. As Schulenberg notes, since sainthood was at this time connected to "exterior actions" in the public domain, women's more limited access to the ecclesiastical hierarchy also confined their ability to acquire the cultural and religious capital of sanctity.²² This situation, as has been observed by many commentators, magnifies the attention to virginity and the integrity of the female body as both avenues to sanctity and guarantors of its authenticity. Certain of the side effects of this undue attention to the female saintly body, in particular, the consequences that such a narrow focus has on the relation of female saint to place, are less well observed. Because it must rigorously abridge its sources and thus is inclined to heighten any narrowing tendencies, a catalogue text like the *OEM* has the advantage, in this respect, of making more obvious what is likely a general trend within hagiography. This observation holds valence even while it is also true that the *OEM* compiler, as Rauer argues elsewhere in this volume, takes "an inclusive and even-handed approach ... to male and female hagiography," including lengthy entries for female saints and apparently keeping himself up to date with new female hagiography.²³ The relative inclusiveness of the *OEM* can be defined only in terms of genre norms, which essentially determine how many and what kind of female saint(s) may be included. Differences in the relation of male and female saints to place in the *OEM* should thus be thought of not as resulting from the unique world view of the compiler, but as the result of these genre norms, which limit and direct the narrative possibilities for male and female saints.

The most important absence in the *OEM* is reference to post-mortem miracles at sites associated with female as opposed to male saints. Whereas fifteen entries for male saints unambiguously mention such miracles, Mary Magdalen is the only female figure clearly associated with them; this ratio is obviously much lower than would be expected, even given that the text includes four times as many male saints as female.²⁴ As Alan Thacker has described it, the recording of post-

mortem miracles performed at places or by means of dust removed from places touched by the corporeal remains of the saint plays an important role in reconfiguring the relations between sanctity, the body, and place in the late antique and early medieval periods.²⁵ The practice of venerating saintly bones at the interment site was popularized in the late fourth century by Pope Damasus, who “systematically exploited” Rome’s great cache of apostles and martyrs by identifying their grave sites with inscriptions and by using the sanctorale to publish their worth.²⁶ While the Roman practice was thus rooted in local devotion of inviolate remains connected to particular places, Thacker relates how Ambrose in Milan was simultaneously developing the more radical procedure of *inventio*, *translatio*, and distribution of secondary relics that would allow saintly place to become, in Peter Brown’s words, portable.²⁷ Favoured were relics soaked in the blood of martyrs, such as earth from the death site, which begins to be seen as equivalent to the entombed body while offering “a potent means by which the saints could transcend place.”²⁸ By the early fifth century, *libelli miraculorum*, or “dossiers of posthumous wonders,” were being compiled in order “to confirm the process by which portable relics from the site of an *inventio* were assimilated to the body itself”; the report of such miracles worked to localize cults around secondary relics.²⁹ The portability of saintly place, a concept that was not initially uncontroversial in the western Church, thus necessitated texts that forged lateral connections between the body and the relic, suggesting that both behaved in similar ways and that both had the capability to infuse miracle-working powers into the surrounding landscape.³⁰ The promotion of such thinking was crucial in an environment in which saintly bodies were just being discovered or, indeed, were absent; this situation necessitated finding a way to sanctify places associated with the saint other than the tomb. Even though this process ultimately derived scriptural authority in the treatment of places associated with Christ’s living and dead body, it was applied, as Thacker notes, to both male and female saints.³¹ For instance, the *tituli*, or parish churches in Rome dedicated both to Saint Cecilia and to Saint Susanna, were not the places of their burial and, in fact, contained no relics of the saints. Such places were viewed as sanctified by physical contact with the martyrs while they were alive and at the moment of their deaths, and thus they became a type of relic in themselves “as martyrial sites, where the holy had lived and shed their blood for the faith.”³²

The process of forging bonds between saint and place, as described by Thacker and other scholars, is generally presented as normative for all saints regardless of gender. The evidence of the *OEM*, however,

suggests that gender is an important modifier of the representation of this relationship in hagiography. It seems difficult to explain in other terms why the reference to posthumous miracles is limited almost solely to entries for male saints, even though free-standing lives for both male and female figures often included a section on such miracles. Perhaps, as an abridged text, the *OEM* might be expected to eliminate many of these post-mortem miracles because they occur after the *dies natalis* itself, which we would expect to be the main focus of a martyrology account.³³ Certainly, in many cases the *OEM* compiler does make this decision to abbreviate. For instance, the entry for Saint Alban, based on the account in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ends with a direct translation of a sentence about the name of the place where Alban died, failing to include Bede's following comments that a church was built at the site where miracles are frequently worked to this day.³⁴ Neither does the compiler mention Bede's later story of how Germanus of Auxerre took away a portion of earth from the site of Alban's death, in which "the blood still showed," even though these actions were clearly modelled on the Ambrosian process and likely had great significance in authorizing "a known local martyr as a champion of orthodoxy."³⁵ But even after eliminating the post-mortem miracles of certain male saints, the *OEM* nevertheless mentions far more of these miracles in association with male than with female figures.

While the *OEM* of course reflects and prolongs the attitude towards holy place of its sources, the editorial decisions made by the compiler significantly enhance the gender asymmetry of these relations, as may be demonstrated by comparing the post-mortem appearances of saints Processus and Martianus with that of Saint Agnes. Following Gregory, the *OEM*'s entry for the male martyrs narrates how, at the church dedicated to them, "sum æðele wif on Rome ond swyðe æwfæst ... gemette heo sume dæge þærute standan twegen Godes þeowas on ælþeodiglicum gegyrlan."³⁶ The saints promise her their protection on Judgment Day, and she returns to her prayer more ardently than before. This episode emphasizes both the universal and the highly public nature of the miracle. The female figure could be any worshipper, since she is not particularized by name and the saints have no relationship to her; indeed, their difference from her is marked by their foreign dress and their choice to address her generically as "wif." The fact that the miracle occurs just outside the church and that it acts to intensify her faith also signifies the saints' role as public ambassadors, whose actions form part of a communal movement to increase and regulate devotion. In contrast, Agnes's appearance at her tomb is an intimate and domestic moment: "naht lange æfter hire browunge, heo ætýwde hire yldrum on middeniht þær hi wácedon æt

hire byrgenne, ond heo cwæþ to him: ‘Ne wepað git me ná swa ic dead sy; ac beoð me efenbliðe, forðon þe ic eom to Criste on heofonum geþeoded ðone ic ær on eorðan lufade.’”³⁷ Just as in the entry for Processus and Martianus, the saint’s direct speech is represented, but the circumstances and message of the appearance are radically different. Occurring only shortly after her martyrdom, the visitation is presented not as a miraculous confirmation of the saint’s link to her tomb as a holy place incorporated in a system of public worship, but as a personal gesture of reassurance for her mourning parents. Given that the *OEM* compiler is drawing on a diverse range of sources for this entry, including not only the Latin *passio* but also Aldhelm’s *Carmen* and *Prosa de virginitate*, he could have mentioned, for instance, that Constantine’s daughter Constantina was healed at Agnes’s tomb. Instead, the inclusion of this intensely private and familial episode, which, for whatever reason, appealed to the compiler, has the effect of de-emphasizing the saint’s post-mortem link to place.³⁸ No doubt this episode found its way into Agnes’s *passio* in the first place during a time “when commemoration of the dead and the cult of martyrs essentially consisted of the same ceremonies, the only apparent difference being the public nature of a martyr’s cult as opposed to the private, family remembrance of their dead.”³⁹ Within the *OEM*’s catalogue of saints, however, such an episode has a differential value, reinforcing the domestic nature of female post-mortem visitation in contrast to the public and enduring links that such appearances forge between male saints and places.⁴⁰

In addition to the far greater number of overt references to place-based miracles associated with male saints, as opposed to the lack of such references for female saints, the *OEM* also genders the relationship between saint and place by means of paradigmatic episodes that suggest an intimate and natural connection between the male saint and the landscape. Several entries feature a threatened disruption of the relationship between the male saintly body and the land, only to reassert their unbreakable coherence in opposition to the bodily and territorial fragmentation that characterizes the unbeliever. For instance, the life of Saint Ananias relates how, after the saint has refused to renounce his faith during the Diocletian persecutions, “sum hæþen gerefa” orders him to be thrown into the sea, along with assorted companions that he has converted along the way and with a mass of lead attached to his neck. While it proves to be the cause of their death, the punishment cannot dissolve the saints’ territorial ties: “Þa toburston þa bendas ond afeoll ð[æt] lead of him, ond hi onsendon / heora gastas to Gode, ond þa lichoman coman to þam waroðe. Ðær Cristene men hi bebyrgdon mid micelre áre, ond þær wæron siððan on ðære stowe

monegu wundor.”⁴¹ In a parodic replay of the situation of punishment, the *passio* makes clear that such deterritorialization of the male body is impossible to inflict upon the Christian saints because it is the consequence of paganism: “Ond se gerefa þe hi cwellan het, se wæs sona mid swa miclum sare gewitnad þæt he nolde læng libban; ac he het his agene men hine sændan on ðone sæ, ond þa sædeór hine sona forswulgon þæt his ne com þy furðor an bân to eorðan.”⁴² Such demonstrations of the variant effects of water on the Christian and pagan male body make obvious reference to the rite of baptism and are fairly common in hagiographical texts. For instance, the Forty Soldiers of Sebastia are martyred by immersion in a “*deopne mere*” filled with “micel is ond yfel” that cuts but does not sever their bodies. However, when one of them experiences doubts, “getweode heora an on his mode,” he runs to a nearby hot spring only to immediately die as “him þa lima ealle tofeollan.”⁴³ Antonius of Apamea overcomes similar bodily dissolution: the pieces of his dead body, having been hacked apart by heathens and thrown into a culvert, unite (“*gesomnodon*”) in the water. What were “*sticceo*,” or pieces, become the singular “*lichoman*” again before burial: “*twā wif geleaffulle ond hine atugon of þam wætere, ond hine þa sum mæssepreost bebyrgde*” (my italics).⁴⁴ A more dramatic version of the same episode occurs in the entry for Quentin, which relates how the severed head and torso of the saint leapt from the river Somme, where they had been thrown by pagan persecutors fifty-five years previously, in response to the prayer of a faithful woman named Eusebia. The play between reunited body and place-based healing miracles is made clear in this entry in the double valence of “*hal*,” both healed and whole: “*ða ahleop se lichoma sona úp of ðam wætere ond þæt heafod on oðre stowe ... Ond þæt wif heo ða arwyrðlice bebyrgde, ond ealle ða untruman men þa ðe þyder comon tó, hy wæron sona hale.*”⁴⁵ What was sundered, “on oðre stowe,” is literally put back in place.

While the resolution of the body is in all these examples clearly meant to materialize spiritual resolution, a recurrent theme in hagiography in general, the particular affinity between the physical wholeness of the saint’s dead body and the land, is not a feature of equivalent water miracles in female lives in the *OEM*. For instance, Saint Christina is also thrown into the sea freighted with a stone fastened to her neck. Although her punishment nominally results from her failure to follow her father’s directive to worship idols, it is imbricated in more complex patriarchal desires to control visual access to the living body of the saint: her father shuts her up in a tower so “*þæt nænig wer hi scolde geseon butan him anum.*”⁴⁶ Saved by God’s angels, who provide her with the ability to walk across the water,

Christ appears and baptizes her in the sea, after which St Michael brings her back to land. Later that day her father sees her walking next to the sea towards the town of Tyro, before “heo þurh martyrdom hire gast onsende to god on heofona rice.”⁴⁷ Unlike the male saints’ miracles at sea, this closing image of Christina walking by the ocean suggests that her association with the water is ultimately more potent than her connection to the land. Central to her story is not, as it is with many of the male saints in the *OEM*, the menaced disintegration of her corpse before burial but a specular focus on her living body, symbolized both by her enclosure in the tower and by her father’s final vision of her prior to her martyrdom.

The emphasis on visual access to Christina’s living body is typical of the lives of female saints, especially of virgin martyrs, as many scholars have observed. The *OEM* is not unusual in containing a number of lives in which the punishments inflicted on the female saintly body are central or in which women are stripped naked and their bodies put on display as part of an effort to force them to worship pagan idols: for instance, Eugenia, Euphemia, Thecla, and Alexandria experience multiple tortures; both Saint Afra and Saint Eulalia are tortured while naked; Lucy, as well as Lucian, Agape, Chionia, Irene, Basilla, Petronella, and Marina are threatened with rape or with forced marriage.⁴⁸ Horner has examined the ways in which “saints’ lives both display and deny the female body,” allegorizing a process of right reading in which the saint’s body “is both an enclosure, a vessel that must be discarded or transformed in order to reach the spirit within, and a spiritual text of truth that must itself be enclosed or veiled.”⁴⁹ While Horner and others have suggested that the emphasis on the inviolate body of the female saint in English texts is of particular significance during an era in which real nuns were threatened with physical attack and rape at the hands of invading Vikings, the link between the desire for female impermeability and anxiety about the *integritas* of English kingdoms remains implicit in this work.⁵⁰ Allegorically overdetermined as female bodies in hagiography are, it seems likely that they could also constitute an image of territorial unity, particularly during a time in which such integrity was being conjured under threat.⁵¹

If, however, it is legitimate to read the *OEM* in this way as, on one level, functioning as a form of political theology, then the valence of female saintly bodies in the production of territorially based communal identity differs distinctively from that of their male counterparts. Because the preservation of chastity is the most prevalent reason for the martyrdom of female saints, female hagiographical texts tend to focus an inordinate amount of attention on the living body of the saint

rather than on the dead body. While this observation is especially applicable to the category of virgin martyrs, even the lives of saints such as Æthelthryth, included in the *OEM* presumably as an example of daily martyrdom in faith, emphasize the unpenetrated purity of the living body. Æthelthryth's miraculous incorruption after death and the post-mortem healing of her neck wound are interpreted, following Bede, as retroactive signs that her body was chaste while she lived. The living body is thus typically the site of the conflicts and threats that constitute female saintly identity, because all female martyrs are in some sense virgin martyrs: as Lees comments, "Female saints confront and overcome the deadliness of their bodies and the deadliness of their sexuality time and again."⁵² In this respect the traditional virgin martyr narrative, in which a woman is tortured while preserving her chastity, could be said to make particularly obvious what is a general trend in female hagiography and is characteristic of the lives of female martyrs in particular.⁵³ As is especially evident in abridged works like the *OEM*, which must refine the saintly life to its pivotal moments, hagiography for virgin martyrs is interested in replaying ad infinitum the saints' final moments, to which death is a necessary but somewhat anticlimactic close. Important for my purpose in this chapter is to note the effect of this narrative focus on the status of post-mortem miracles associated with female saints. That is to say, because hagiography works to resuscitate the female saint as a living, unpenetrated, unified body, post-mortem miracles at the site of the dead body act as a narrative distraction from immersion in this eternal present of the saint's transcendent resistance. Arguably, then, the *OEM* compiler is conditioned by the constraints of the hagiographical genre to avoid reference to such miracles in his entries for female saints. As a consequence, even though a powerful symbol for unity, the female saintly body in the *OEM* remains representational: an abstracted ideal ready for co-optation as an image of territorial coherence, rather than a pattern for forging affective and particular bonds between people and land.

In contrast, many entries for male saints, as I discussed above, quite literally posit a more earthy relationship between the saintly corpse and the place of death or burial, using motifs of wholeness versus fragmentation to inscribe a process of attachment between body and land. These narratives stage an occlusion of saint into landscape, carefully differentiating this sanctioned process of dissolution from the threat of bodily fragmentation and loss that is posed to the body of the male unbeliever. For instance, the entry for John the Evangelist notes: "his birgen is mid Grecum on Effessio þære ceastre; æt þære byrg[i]ne bið wellmicel wundor gesewen / and gehired: hwilon heo eðað swá

lifiende man slape, hwílon þonne man þa byrgine sceawað, þonne ne bið þær nan lich[o]ma gesewen, ác bið micel swetnisse stenc. Forþam nat nænig man hwæper sé Iohannes sí þe cwicu þe dead.”⁵⁴ In a conventional sense, this entry seeks to demonstrate in physical terms the metaphysical notion that a saint is simultaneously present in the grave and in heaven at the same time, while also emphasizing the central Christian tenet of the triumph of death over life. In the process, however, the grave itself is personified, taking on attributes of the saint in such a way as to confuse the boundary between saintly body and place: “heo,” the “byrgine,” breathes as though a living, sleeping man. An Anglo-Saxon audience would have been familiar with this basic notion from Bede’s life of Oswald in Book III of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The healing properties demonstrated by places associated with this saint and by earth taken from these places are repeatedly said to be a reflex of the king’s piety during his life: for instance, Bede comments on the site of Oswald’s death at Maserfelth, “Nec mirandum in loco mortis illius infirmos sanari, qui semper dum uiueret infirmis et pauperibus consulere, elimosynas dare, opem ferre non cessabat.”⁵⁵ Of the place where Oswald erected a cross and prayed with his army before the battle of Heavenfield, Bede similarly observes, “In cuius loco orationis innumerae uirtutes sanitatum noscuntur esse patratae, ad indicium uidelicet ac memoriam fidei regis.”⁵⁶ Like the claim that John’s tomb breathes as a living man, Bede suggests that the place Heavenfield memorializes by repetition the king’s action in praying to the cross, distilling the essence of his faith and continually replicating his piety through the performance of miracles. Place has become the man himself.

The image of John’s sometimes occupied and sometimes empty tomb also represents synchronically what was common in the practice of saintly devotion in Anglo-Saxon culture and was characteristic of Oswald’s cult in particular: worship at places associated with the saint but emptied of their body or body parts. In Oswald’s case, identifying the site of his death as Maserfelth becomes so popular because of its miracle-working properties that the removal of earth, to be used in water as a remedy for illness, leaves a large hole there: “paulatim ablata exinde terra fossam ad mensuram staturae uirilis altam reddiderit.”⁵⁷ Such ready proliferation of holy places, particularly the detail of holes in the landscape, has often been seen as marking a cult’s popular orientation. However, as Thacker notes, “these ‘popular’ sites are of precisely the same kind as those associated with the great cult complexes,” in particular the large hole made by removal of earth from the place where water used to wash Cuthbert was poured at Lindisfarne.⁵⁸ Bede also describes a house-like shrine built over,

according to John Blair, saint Ceadda's former burial site, with a hole in the side for pilgrims to gain access to saintly earth.⁵⁹ The border between popular and ecclesiastical practice was thus clearly porous, and "legends may have been passed backwards and forwards between laity, who circulated them orally, and monastic writers, who gave them coherence and moral purpose."⁶⁰ Certainly many of the particulars of "emptied" holy places, the very earth of which was thought to embody the saint's own healing properties, were modelled on traditional and well-rehearsed understandings of the Ascension site. Both Bede in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the compiler of the *OEM* include a description of the workings of this site, digested from Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*, in which it is emphasized that, although the faithful remove earth from the place, the level of earth is miraculously never diminished.⁶¹ Several entries in the *OEM* dramatize this connection between male saintly body and earth by describing how saints are tortured by being buried alive in holes in the ground. Saint Vitalis, for instance, is martyred after he is placed in a "deopne seað" that is filled with earth and rocks; the pagan persecutor of Saint Marcellus, "het adelfan seap oþ gyrdyls deopne, ond he bebead þone Godes wer þæt mon hine bebyrgde in þam seaðe oþ þone gyrdels, þæt him lifiendum were 'þæt to wite' þæt þam forþweardan / men bið to reste. Ond he þa þurhwunode swa in þam seaðe ðry dagas lifgende in Godes lofsongum, ond þa/ ageaf ðone clænan gast."⁶² Hybridizing the male saintly body and the earth, these examples trouble the boundary between the living body of the saint, his corpse, and the land, and encourage a concept of territorialized masculinity in which the land and the saint have an essential and indissoluble connection.

The removal of saintly earth from death and burial sites diffuses this connection and is demonstrative of the ways in which the male saint serves to ground communal identity. The importance of the carnality of the earth itself – in which "the blood still showed," as Germanus notes of the dust taken from the site of Alban's death – finds a corresponding physical emphasis in the pilgrims' ability to touch the earth, to place it near their bodies, and even to ingest it. And although the model for such behaviour was found in Holy Land sites, the intensely physical configuration of this relationship seems to have been innovative and, as both Thacker and Crook suggest, was probably imported to England from Merovingian Gaul, since it was certainly not a feature of Roman practice.⁶³ Moreover, according to Crook, while the physicality that had characterized Gaulish treatment of saintly bodies was largely abandoned under the Carolingian regime, which resuscitated a preference for Roman practice, Anglo-Saxon England maintained this focus until at least the eleventh century.⁶⁴ This particularly English

demand for tangible access to the saint and to the saintly place builds upon established hagiographical motifs that confuse and conflate the male saintly body and the land and causes a uniquely insular model for community formation to emerge from scriptural and Continental precedent. In this model, an essential connection between the male saintly body and the land, forged by means of the narrative motifs I have discussed, is diffused to the community at large – indeed, it is arguably represented as creating this community – by means of the dissemination and even ingestion of saintly earth. The Eucharistic underpinnings of this process are clear, and they suggest that the same type of slippage between substance, body, and community is being invoked mimetically to produce the bodies of believers as a peculiar type of territorially based and created community. As Martin and Kryst note, “Mimesis confuses boundaries between self and environment, allowing one to take on, experience, feel, become, embody certain qualities of place. Ritualization ... is this process – the simultaneous production of certain kind of bodies and places.”⁶⁵ In contrast to the almost-dead body of the female saint – the coherence of which, accessed via the specular, can provide an abstracted and idealized image for territorial or political unity – the male saintly body is deliberately occluded in hagiography within the landscape itself, suggesting an affective and immediate bond between saint, earth, and worshipper.

Conclusion

The *OEM* is a difficult text to analyse in the course of a single chapter, which is probably why it has more often been treated in part, especially in recent work that has concentrated on sourcing the individual entries. While such work is essential, it is also important to ask what cumulative effect a compendium like the *OEM* would have on its reader and user: to probe the patterns it suggests and the connections it naturalizes, especially as these intersect with contemporary anxieties and issues. Lees and Overing’s comments on Pseudo-Bede’s *Collectanea* are worth considering here because, like this text, the *OEM* “does not have a centre and therefore none of its items ... are incidental to it.”⁶⁶ Discovering the relationship of works like this to their immediate contexts of copying requires a carefully nuanced approach, which expects to reveal phenomena with significance wider than the particular text: as Lees and Overing describe it, “Given such gender asymmetries in the relation of subjects to knowledge, the pro- and anti-feminine items in the *Collectanea* invite meditation more generally on the complex relations between woman as subject and object, as

metaphor and referent, in discursive formations. These are relations of rhetoric, knowledge, and power that cut across the ad hoc structure of this particular text.”⁶⁷ As I have argued here, the *OEM* establishes similarly “complex relations” between gender, body, and place, relations that draw upon and reference prevailing hagiographical tradition, but that are particularly marked within this abbreviated and compendious text. Although these relations are connected to the practice of the cult of saints, which can never be imagined to be entirely separate from the textual world of hagiography, they also have a discursive function that is distinct from the worship communities surrounding local saints, which seem to have relied on notions of holy place in association with both male and female saints. A text like the *OEM*, which presents itself as a form of universal discourse, suggests strong connections between the male saintly body and the land, connections that are not made in an equivalent way for female saints. In particular, the paucity of place-based miracles for female saints in the collection, when compared with those of their male counterparts, is striking, as is the lack of narratives that establish connections between the female body and the earth. As I have suggested, the reason for this difference in the treatment of male and female saints centres on the varying role of the body, which, in the lives of female saints, provides the route to sainthood itself. The living body of the female virgin martyr, threatened with rape, torture, and death, is therefore narratively more important than the cataloguing or description of posthumous miracles, particularly those that would substitute for the saintly body itself. As a consequence of this more intense narrative focus on the living body of the female saint, this body in itself is rendered a locus for the working out of narratives of sovereignty and integrity. In contrast, the male saintly body, dissolved within the landscape, enforces a notion of geography itself as not only historical but masculine. Unlike the body of the male saint, which serves to ground a territorial notion of community through the trope of sacred earth, the body of the female saint is politicized, functioning to refract anxieties about the permeability of borders. Where narratives of male saints provide a trope for linking place with history specifically by occluding the body, female saints’ bodies themselves are places for citing (and siting) the coherence of the political and religious community.

Reading the *OEM* in this way raises a number of interesting questions about its function at different times in its long history. Given that it was very likely composed at a time when Britain was much troubled by Viking attacks that were threatening the integrity of individual Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the *OEM*’s gendered epistemology of

place seems of particular resonance. More interesting, though, is its copying in the late ninth century, a time at which, as a number of scholars have argued, the intellectual environment around Alfred's court was generating an incipient national discourse.⁶⁸ The division of territory with the Scandinavian invaders, which produced the region later known as the Danelaw, not only had the effect of strengthening emergent notions of England and Englishness, but also surely made territorial fragmentation a timely topic. In this context, the utility and interest of the *OEM* could be as much about gravitation towards expressions of unity as it was about preserving useful information about particular saints, for many of which there is no or little evidence of liturgical celebration in England. It is short-sighted, perhaps, to look for expressions of English identity only in the discourse surrounding native saints; a universalizing text like the *OEM* would be highly influential in shaping consciousness of the relationship between saint and place in general, a mode of thinking that was, of course, transferable to the specific context of English saints. How the English came to understand themselves as essentially tied to the land they occupied, and to conceive of that land as a coherent and bounded territory, required, as it still does, significant investment in discursive modes that make and maintain these connections. The entries of the *OEM* suggest that the field of gender was far from a neutral term in this process.

Form and Genre

3 Why Is Margaret's the Only *Life* in London, BL, Cotton MS Tiberius A.iii?

TRACEY-ANNE COOPER

Margaret of Antioch, or Marina, the name by which she was known in the Eastern Church, was probably martyred in the early fourth century, most likely at Antioch.¹ Hardly anything, however, can be established about her with any certainty, and the lack of concrete evidence for her existence, as well as some of the more fantastical elements of her legend, led to the suppression of her cult by the Vatican in 1969.² There is no evidence for a cult of Margaret before the end of the eighth century, but Margaret nevertheless was to become one of western Europe's most venerated saints. She was one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, whose cult was popularized in the post-plague period; she was one of the saints who spoke to Joan of Arc; and she became the patron saint of the Netherlands. Her cult was widespread throughout Europe from around the turn of the millennium and was especially vigorous in late Anglo-Saxon England. The Old English lives of Margaret are part of a vernacular trend identified by Rosalind Love that celebrated "martyrs and holy women from long ago and far away."³

One of the two extant Old English lives of Margaret, that in London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A.iii (hereafter **T**), occurs in an unusual context, as it is the only piece of hagiography included in a collection of ninety-four diverse texts. In order to understand why this version of Margaret's vernacular *Life* was included in **T**, it is necessary to examine both the context of the manuscript in which it is incorporated and the context of the monastery that produced the manuscript – Christ Church, Canterbury. The immediate manuscript context of the *Life* is a very simple catechism for the laity, which emphasizes salvation and the personal choice to be righteous and avoid the snares of the Devil. Abandoned by her father, Margaret had a weak social position readily recognized by the laity, thus rendering her example of Christian virtue and steadfastness under duress all the more striking as a complement to the pastoral program. In the *Life* Margaret makes two extraordinary promises to those who showed special devotion to her: their sins would be remitted and their children born healthy. These promises no doubt spurred the development of her cult at Christ Church. **T**, however, is not just a pastoral manuscript: it opens

with a group of explicitly Benedictine texts, which would have been relevant to the monks who had been present at Christ Church since the Benedictine reform fifty years earlier. This version of Margaret's *Life* reflects a monastic emphasis on steadfast chastity and, moreover, retains sufficient layered allusions to satisfy monastic contemplation. Its lay and monastic interests speak to the context of its production at the monastery-cathedral of Christ Church. There is only one piece of hagiography in T, because the simplicity of the pastoral program in this manuscript, which was not linked to the liturgical calendar, required only the one piece, one exemplar of Christian virtue. This vernacular version of Margaret's *Life* was chosen because it reflects the contemporary pastoral and monastic interests of Christ Church and their development of a cult of Margaret at their monastery-cathedral.

A very brief note on the community at Christ Church at the time of the production of T is a necessary preface to the discussion of the *Life* and its manuscript context. When Dunstan introduced the Benedictine reform to Christ Church, he did not eject the secular clerks as Æthelwold had done at Winchester.⁴ The 'B' version of Dunstan's *Life* mentions that he taught an anthem that he had witnessed in a dream to "all those who were subject to him, both monks and also clerks."⁵ The Bosworth Psalter produced at Dunstan's Canterbury, which "contains all the important texts of the Benedictine Office,"⁶ shows that monks were present, but it is unclear whether the community at Christ Church was, before the Conquest, ever thoroughly monastic.⁷ Christ Church continued to have a monastic presence, however, and in 1020 a monk of their own community, Æthelnoth, was elevated to the archbishopric, and the Christ Church scriptorium continued to produce manuscripts with Benedictine relevance, including the Arundel Psalter (1012–23), which had "methodical divisions of the psalms for the Benedictine Office,"⁸ and T, which opens with the *Benedictine Rule* and *Regularis Concordia*. Joyce Hill, in evaluating Wulfstan's role as a reformer, has reminded us to take a broader view of the late Anglo-Saxon reform movement rather than simply concentrating on the revival of strict monastic observance.⁹ Thus, the question of whether the community at Christ Church was thoroughly monastic or retained some clerks alongside its monks is somewhat moot (at least for the purposes of this chapter) and certainly less important than the community's continued ability to combine the roles of monastery and cathedral. When Christ Church became a monastery-cathedral under Dunstan, it gained monastic observance, but it also retained the pastoral responsibilities and functions of the cathedral; we can observe both these aspects – the pastoral and the monastic – in the compilation of the texts in T and, as will be argued below, in the choice of this vernacular version of

Margaret's *Life* as the solitary piece of hagiography within that compilation.

Many aspects of the *Life* of Margaret will be familiar as standard topoi in the lives of virgin saints; however, there are also some elements of Margaret's story that are far from standard. Margaret was a Christian child of pagan parents, whose father abandoned her. She was tending her Christian foster-mother's sheep when she was spotted by the evil Roman prefect, Olibrius, who desired her. When he found out that she was a steadfast Christian and would not worship his gods and surrender her virginity to him, he had her beaten with canes. Despite this torture, she was unrelenting in her Christianity and so he cast her into prison. While she was in prison, a holy man named Theotimus, who was giving her bread and water, witnessed her overcoming two demons: the first in the guise of a dragon and the second in the guise of a black man. A dove (or an angel in some versions) then appeared and gave her a crown, telling her she would be welcomed into heaven. She was again tortured, first with burning torches and then in a bath of boiling water, but she regarded the latter torture as a baptism and escaped unharmed. Olibrius then ordered her to be beheaded; before she died, however, she prayed, asking God that anybody who made particular devotions to her be granted the forgiveness of all their sins and be granted a healthy baby. A dove then appeared from heaven to confirm that God would send three angels to hear the prayers of all those who called upon the Lord in her name. Her executioner, Malchus, was converted; then he reluctantly beheaded her and fell on his own sword. Margaret's head (in the T version, but in other versions her soul or her body) was taken up into heaven by angels, and she became responsible for posthumous miracles.

Clayton and Magennis have analysed the transmission of the Margaret legend in their book *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, a task made difficult by the different Greek and Latin versions, which include or omit various episodes of her legend. The two extant versions of the Old English *Life* of Margaret, in T and in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 (hereafter CCC 303), are anonymous and not only disagree with one another, but also do not agree with any extant Latin version. The earliest textual evidence for an Anglo-Saxon interest in Margaret is in the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology*. In the tenth century, a Latin version of her *Life* was recorded in the English manuscript, Paris, BnF lat. 5574, and in the early eleventh century, an Old English version of her *Life* was included among other saints' lives in the no-longer extant London, BL, Cotton Otho B.x.¹⁰

The two extant Old English versions occur in very different

manuscript contexts. The earliest, from the first half of the eleventh century, is in T and has ninety-four different texts and two illustrations. The texts initially present quite a farrago: monastic rules, homilies, liturgy, confessional directives, prognostics, scientific treatises, notes and commonplaces, a charm, a lapidary, a manual for monastic sign language, the *Examinatio* of an incumbent bishop, and a single saint's life – that of Margaret.¹¹ The other Old English *Life* of Margaret, in CCC 303, a Rochester manuscript of the first quarter of the twelfth century, has a more orthodox context, as it is included among a collection of homilies and saints' lives presented in the order of the liturgical calendar.¹² While the versions of the vernacular *Life* of Margaret may differ, the close connection between the two Kentish sees, Christ Church and Rochester, should be noted, Rochester being very much the junior see.¹³ Moreover, by the time the *Life* of Margaret was recorded in CCC 303, Rochester had also become a Benedictine monastery-cathedral, having been refounded by Lanfranc in 1067.¹⁴

Manuscript context can provide invaluable clues as to the function of a particular text in a particular circumstance. As Fred Robinson commented regarding Old English poems: when we read an Old English literary text we should take care to find out what precedes it in its manuscript state and what follows it. We should know whether it is an independent text or part of another, larger text. We should have some sense of the poem's *mise en page* and some conception of the manuscript as a whole. For medieval books often constituted composite artefacts in which each component text depended on its environment for part of its meaning. If a text is detached from its codicological background (as texts normally are in our modern editions), we risk losing part of the meaning.¹⁵

Obviously this advice about Old English poetry has a broader application to all sorts of texts found in composite or compilation manuscripts, including the *Life* of Margaret in T.¹⁶ Moreover, Robinson's guidance regarding context can be broadened further to include the context of the manuscript's production: the location of the scriptorium that produced it and its historical and intellectual milieu. It must be assumed that even similar texts, such as hagiographies, could have had different functions if they were recorded in highly different types of manuscripts or for use with different communities. Thomas D. Hill has succinctly described the expected function of hagiographic texts:

Hagiographic texts served two main functions ... On the one hand, such texts could be read as Christian literature – texts to be read in public or in private for pleasure and for instruction – and on the other, certain

hagiographic texts served a specific quasi-liturgical function. Both “secular” and “regular” services commemorated the saints, and there were various occasions, both in the liturgy of the Mass and in the daily order of religious observances of monastic and other comparable groups in which hagiographic texts could appropriately serve as readings, “legends” in the service.¹⁷

Hill contrasts the type of *vitae* intended for use in legends, which were, by necessity, brief and straightforward, such as the collection in the *Old English Martyrology*,¹⁸ with the literary *vitae* or art *vitae*, such as the Old English saints’ lives in poetry form – for example, *Elene* and *Juliana*, which can be much more complex because they do not function as a comprehensible digest.¹⁹ The purpose of the Old English *Life* of Margaret within CCC 303 is fairly apparent from its manuscript context, as it occurs among other saints’ lives in the order of the feast days in the liturgical calendar. We can assume that its primary function was to be read to the congregation at Rochester on Margaret’s feast day. The *Life* of Margaret in T, however, as a solitary piece of hagiography, was unlikely to have been intended for the same function as the CCC 303 version. The *Life* in T needs to be read alongside the pastoral texts that succeed it in the manuscript in order to ascertain how it was used and why it was included.

The first thing to note about the collection of fifteen homilies that follow the *Life* is that they have been heavily redacted and subjected to extensive extraction and interpolation in order to make them fit the purpose they serve in this manuscript. As Donald Scragg noted:

it is interesting to note that in almost every case the version in M [our T: Cotton Tiberius A.iii] has been significantly altered. An Ælfric homily (Ker 16) is supplemented with quotations from an earlier anonymous piece, a Sunday letter (Ker 17) is expanded with bits of anonymous homilies, an incident that forms part of Vercelli homily IX is reconstructed as an independent story (Ker 18), and bits of various Wulfstan homilies are assembled in a scissors-and-paste fashion (Ker 19). Even the *De Temporibus* is in an inferior version. It is hardly surprising that the saint’s life is in a form otherwise unknown in English and Latin.²⁰

Although Clayton and Magennis believe that the T version is an almost faithful translation of a now lost exemplar that predates all known Latin versions,²¹ it seems more reasonable to conclude with Scragg that the T *Life* was, like its counterparts in the manuscript, redacted to fit its purpose.

The homilies of T, folios 77v–93v, combine to form a simple and

compassionate catechism, which would provide even the most ignorant layman with an understanding of the basics of Christian theology and worship.²² They deliver in a shorthand form the essential Biblical basics. A heavily redacted version of Ælfric's *Homily for Palm Sunday* has been extracted from its usual position in the liturgical calendar and here used to relate the events of the New Testament, from the Transfiguration to the Resurrection.²³ Likewise, the *Sunday Letter* is used in this context to disseminate the Old Testament stories of the Creation, the Flood and the Ten Commandments.²⁴ Throughout the collection of fifteen homilies there is a concentration on the development of a well-formed Christian conscience, readily witnessed in a redacted version of Wulfstan's *Sermo ad Populum*: "That we wish to love God and trust in Him and keep His commandments and shun the devil, and eagerly avoid his bad teachings ... Let us turn back from sin and pray to God with an inward heart that He will protect us against peril."²⁵ The homiletic collection also includes an account by a devil describing the sweetness of heaven and the horrors of hell; this may account for the omission in the T version of Margaret's *Life* of the lengthy "speech of confession and submission" by the Devil, which is found in other versions.²⁶ The succeeding homilies on folios 88v–93r are formed from an adaptation of Wulfstan, with some interpolations, which emphasize, in no uncertain terms, that the decision between the two on Judgment Day is dependent on good conduct in this life, conduct that stems from the development of a good Christian conscience. It is only after these exhortations addressing inner reflection that the external actions of Christianity are explained: fasting, tithes, baptism, and praying the *Pater noster* and the *Credo*. The homilies collectively form a simple and comprehensive lesson for the unlearned, designed to impart sufficient knowledge and instruction to facilitate Christian conformity and orthodoxy but, most important, salvation. The collection could be used whenever necessary to teach basic Christian belief and practice and was not tied to the liturgical calendar. Margaret's *Life* was the hagiographic complement to this simple catechism, and, like Ælfric's *Homily for Palm Sunday* that immediately succeeds it, it has been extracted from its usual context as part of the liturgical calendar, then adapted and recast as part of a program of Christian instruction that could be used at any time.

The collections of confessional directives in T share a similar practical simplicity.²⁷ The collection of ten confessional directives at folios 94v–97r provides private advice to the confessor on the subtleties and complexities of his task – namely, the assignment of penance according to what was confessed and the status of the person who confessed it. These confessional texts, like the homilies, seem to reflect

a heartfelt concern for the spiritual welfare of the laity, and they comprise a genuine, realistic, and compassionate plan for the churching of laypeople and for their salvation. These homilies and confessional directives surround the *Examinatio* for an incumbent bishop.²⁸ It almost seems that the examination that qualifies a bishop for his office has been nestled deliberately between examples of good episcopal practice that will facilitate the salvation of lay souls. The central message of the *Life* of Margaret reflects that of T's collections of homilies and confessional directives: resisting the temptations of the devil and standing steadfast in belief by following the developed "inward heart," which in combination with Christ's Redemptive Passion can ensure salvation.

The homilies of T are, at their core, about the essentials of the Christian life and the path to salvation, and Margaret's *Life* is provided in this context as an example of a Christian who had already clearly achieved salvation. There were, however, many saints whose lives could have been selected to fulfil this function within the manuscript, so why was Margaret chosen as the sole exemplar in T? Margaret's abilities as a dragon-slayer may have been responsible in part for her meteoric rise in popularity with the laity; dragons were (and still are) exciting and popular, not only in hagiography, but also in secular literature, an obvious example being Beowulf's final and fatal battle with a dragon. Margaret, however, is not unique as a saintly dragon-slayer: in the same period as her cult was developing in western Europe, cults were also developing around two other saintly dragon-slayers: George and Michael.

A further reason for Margaret's popularity, aside from dragon-slaying, was her role as patroness of childbirth.²⁹ This was a widely regarded aspect of her cult by the twelfth century, but embedded within the manuscript context of T there is evidence of an earlier development of her role as patron saint of childbirth. Seven of the twenty-two prognostics within T could be relevant to pregnant mothers, anxious fathers-to-be, and those who cared for them. It can perhaps be extrapolated from their proximity within the same manuscript that the prognostics and Margaret's *Life* were consulted with the similar purpose of prenatal care. Five of these texts are fairly straightforward prognostics that purport to predict the character of a child: four based upon the day of the lunar month on which the child was born and one upon the day of the week.³⁰ There are, however, two other texts, unique to T, that offer more practical obstetric advice. The first is a short text on the growth of a fetus; it is imagined as the weaving of a series of consecutive layers added incrementally over the period of gestation, beginning with the brain and concluding with the

breast organs.³¹ The other obstetric text discusses the sex of a child, which can be determined by the actions and appearance of its mother while pregnant, for example, “If the womans [*sic*] belly is high up, she will bear a boy; if it be sunk down, she will produce a girl.”³² This text also discusses eating habits that can seriously affect the health of the baby; for example, if she eats the meat of male animals (the text specifies bulls, rams, bucks, boars, cocks, and ganders), then the child may become “humpbacked” (“honorode”) or “bent” (“healed”).³³ If these prognostic and obstetric texts in T were relevant primarily to concerned mothers-to-be and those who cared for them, then we could perhaps assume that Margaret’s cult, and thus her *Life*, might have already obtained this aspect by the late Anglo-Saxon period.

It must not be assumed that the archbishops of Canterbury, although they were reformed Benedictines, were completely removed from the very worldly sphere of childbirth: indeed, it was an essential component of one aspect of their pastoral function – the ritual purification, or churching, of women after they had given birth. This was a matter of concern for the very first archbishop of Canterbury, Augustine, who included it in his advice-seeking letter to Pope Gregory at the beginning of his mission: “Should a pregnant woman be baptized? And when the child has been born how much time should elapse before she can enter the church?”³⁴ Gregory responds with “tolerance and compromise,” and seems more concerned with conversion than the imposition of what Helene Scheck calls the “Mediterranean idea of female impurity.”³⁵ Scheck’s argument that it was Augustine, not the Anglo-Saxons, who was concerned with ritual purification is bolstered by the continued necessity to regulate the practice of ritual purification in Theodore’s *Penitentials*.³⁶ By the late Anglo-Saxon period, the meaning of churching was transforming from “protecting sacred space from blood pollution” to a celebratory event that “honoured marriage” and had elements of “transition and thanksgiving.”³⁷ The archbishop, presumably, at times would have performed churching rites in the cathedral at Canterbury, particularly of high-status women, and he would also have been responsible for the priests who would have performed churchings in the other churches of the city and its hinterlands as well as, ultimately, for the practice among all of southern England’s bishops and priests. It became common for a woman to offer candles during her churching, which were then burnt at Candlemas the feast that celebrated Mary’s purification in the Temple, forty days after the birth of Christ.³⁸

There are two reasons why Margaret became so widely regarded as the patroness of childbirth: first, the dragon-devil’s attempt to swallow Margaret can be read as an inversion of both intercourse and

childbirth. Margaret's virginal body, sealed up tight with the sign of the Cross, is a phallus-like weapon that penetrates the over-zealous maw of the dragon-devil causing him to split in two, and she then emerges from his carcass, like a newborn. Second, while these miraculous inversions of intercourse and childbirth may possibly have brought comfort, or at least a wry smile, to the medieval mother-to-be, it is the extraordinary promise of a healthy baby that Margaret made in her final prayer before her martyrdom that consolidates her role as patron saint of childbirth. The version in T reads:

God, þu þe heofenan mid honda gemettest and eorþan on þinre fyst betyndeð, geher mine bena þæt swa hwilc man swa writeþ mine þrowunga oþþe hi geheraþ rædan, of þære tide syn adylgade heora synna; oþþe gif hwilc man leoht deþ on minum cirican of his geswinge, be swa hwylcan gylte swa he bidde forgifenesse ne si him seo synna geteold. Ic bidde þe, Drihten, þæt gif hwilc mon si gemetod on þinum þam egeslican dome and he si gemindig minum naman and þines, gefreolsa hine, Drihten, of tintregan. Get ic þe bidde, Drihten, þæt se þe macað boc mines martirhades oþþe on his huse hæbbe, sy his synna eal alætnesse, forþon þe we syndon flæsc and blod æfre syngiende and næfre ablinnende. Get ic þe bidde, Drihten, þæt se þe cyrcan timbrige on minum naman and þær awrite mine þrowunge oþþe of his gewinne gebicge, send on hine, Drihten, þono Halgan Gast. And þær boc sy mines martyrhades, ne sy þær geboren blind cild ne healt, ne dumb, ne deaf, ne fram unclænum gaste geswenct, ac sy þær sib and lufu and soþfæstnesse gast. And se þe þær biddeþ his synna forgifnesse, gecyþe him, Drihten, his bene.³⁹

A book of Margaret's martyrdom, such as that contained in T, therefore had the power to prevent calamity during pregnancy. Margaret's promise, however, not only was made on behalf of pregnant women, but was broadly applicable to all persons: through devotion to Margaret any contrite sinner could find salvation. Margaret rapidly became Europe's new virgin super-saint, enthusiastically venerated by the early eleventh century, despite the fact that her relics came to the west only in the late tenth century. Her popularity grew exponentially, in part because she was the bold dragon-slayer depicted in her iconography and also because the veneration of Margaret could ensure a successful pregnancy. Margaret, moreover, retained the general ability to help facilitate salvation, which would have made her popular with a broad range of the laity. As noted above, the manuscript reflects not only the pastoral interests of Christ Church, but also its status as a reformed Benedictine monastery-cathedral. While the lay audience for the version of Margaret's *Life* chosen for T would have appreciated the virtues discussed above, the learned religious of the Christ Church

community would have read it differently and appreciated it for very different reasons. Hugh Magennis, in his work on the adaptations made to the Old English *Lives* of Margaret for the benefit of their vernacular audience, has stressed the way in which the CCCC 303 version has been given a more thorough overhaul by its redactor, rendering the emphasis “more devotional in character than the Tiberius [version].”⁴⁰ The T version, he concludes, “introduces considerable simplification in its adaptation of its source,” and yet at the same time it remains “strongly biblical in its imagery.”⁴¹ The design of the redactor of T seems to have been to produce a vernacular version that was not over-complicated for the laity, but at the same time retained enough biblical allusion to satisfy the nimble minds of the Christ Church religious.

Margaret’s role in *imitatio Christi* is emphasized in the *Life* from beginning to end. When we first encounter her, she is tending sheep, and, as Katherine Lewis points out, “The image of her guarding sheep also invites comparison to Christ, ‘the Good Shepherd who giveth his life for his sheep’” (John 10:11).⁴² In the last moments of her earthly life Margaret also takes on Christ-like attributes when she asks that her death become an avenue for salvation for those who make devotions to her. Katherine Lewis argues that “Margaret has become a figurative type of Christ, suffering to obtain divine favour for her followers and ultimately taking her place in heaven.”⁴³ There are many parallels between Christ’s actions and words in the canonical gospels and Margaret’s *Life* in T. Jesus’s baptism is followed immediately by the appearance of the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, and a voice saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).⁴⁴ Christ is, of course, subsequently tempted by the Devil (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). These events have resonance with Margaret’s experiences: when she is cast into prison she is assaulted by devils, and when she endures her third torture in the bath (baptism) of boiling water, a dove appears carrying a crown and a voice says, “Come, Margaret, to the heavens. Blessed are you who have desired virginity: for this reason you are blessed in eternity.”⁴⁵ Like Christ, Margaret has her own trials with devils and a baptism followed by a heavenly affirmation. Margaret’s curative powers are also analogous to those of Christ; in her final request before martyrdom, she says, “where the book of my martyrdom is [kept] may there not be born a child who is blind or lame or dumb or deaf.”⁴⁶ In the T version, Theotimus refers to similar curative powers in Christ: “the Son took on human form and suffered death for all mankind ... and he made the blind to see and gave hearing to the deaf.”⁴⁷

After Margaret’s final prayer a dove bearing a cross appears and says, “Arise, Margaret, blessed was the womb that bore you,” an

allusion to Luke 11:27 and more widely to the chapter of Luke in which Christ teaches the Lord's Prayer and casts out demons.⁴⁸ Margaret also mirrors Christ's own words during His Passion, issuing a pitiful prayer while in prison: "Look upon me and have mercy, Lord, for I am alone here and my father abandoned me. Do not abandon me, Lord, but have mercy on me."⁴⁹ This would put those with biblical knowledge in mind of Christ's prayer on the Cross in Matthew 27:46, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁵⁰ Christ's final words in John 16:33, "I have overcome the world,"⁵¹ are reflected in Margaret's words: "Brother, take your sword and put me to death, for now indeed I have overcome this world."⁵² This phrase was also used in 1 John 5:5: "And this is the victory that overcometh the world: our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"⁵³ Thus, in her final words, Margaret speaks both in *imitatio Christi* and as a faithful Christian. Finally, the soldiers who execute both Christ and Margaret have last-minute conversions because they come to understand the nature of their deeds. Thus, we can see that this simplified vernacular version of Margaret's *Life*, though modified in many ways for lay teaching, still had, embedded within it, sufficient density of biblical allusions to make it interesting for Canterbury's religious community.

The monastic audience of this *Life* would naturally have been concerned with its emphasis on perpetual virginity. One of the conundrums of Margaret's *Life* that would no doubt have exercised the religious mind was the question of who presented the real threat to her virginity. Common sense would seem to dictate that the danger came from Olibrius's lust, but the text tells us that, while Olibrius certainly "plotted" against her virginity, the real danger of violation came in her encounters with the devils. When the prefect Olibrius saw Margaret tending sheep, he desired her and sent his men to enquire whether she was free or a slave; if she was free, he intended to marry her, but if she was a slave, he wanted to buy her. It is important to notice that Olibrius never expresses any intent to rape Margaret and, upon establishing that she is a free woman, he seeks to marry her. On each of the three occasions she is brought before him, he asks her first to worship his gods and then to become his wife, and he tells her that "it will be as well for you as it is for me" ("þe byþ swa wel swa me is").⁵⁴ There is much controversy and debate among contemporary scholars about the place of violence and rape in the lives of virgin saints but perhaps it can be argued that Margaret's Christianity was not just the spiritual protection of her virginity, but also a legal impediment to Olibrius's desires.⁵⁵ During the Great Persecution of Diocletian and Galerius (AD 303–12), which was conducted with particular ferocity in

the east, to be a Christian constituted treachery and therefore was illegal. If a Christian persisted in his/her treachery, then it became a capital offence – especially for a woman who by definition could not enjoy the rights of Roman citizenship. It would have been extremely unwise, therefore, for Olibrius to have had a willing relationship with a woman in such an illegal situation. When Olibrius first sent his soldiers to find out Margaret's status, they came back and told him: "Lord, you cannot take her, for she prays to the God who was hanged by the Jews" ("Hlaford, ne miht þu hi onfon, forþon to Gode heo hig gebiddaþ, se þe wæs ahangen fram Iudeum").⁵⁶

It would have been very ill-advised for a Roman, particularly a prefect in charge of the persecution of Christians, to have sex with a Christian woman, and this, perhaps, makes sense of Olibrius's violent anger. According to the T version, "The prefect was very angry then and he ordered the holy Margaret to be shut up in prison while he considered how he might destroy her virginity" ("Se geref a wæs þa swiþe yrre and het þa halgan Margaretan on karcerne betynan oþþæt he geþohte hu he hire mægþhad forspilde").⁵⁷ Olibrius has Margaret's physical body in his power, he could torture her, and he could put her on trial, but he could not rape her because she was a Christian and the illegality of having sex with a Christian would have seriously jeopardized his power and position. At the time of Diocletian the rescript of laws issued by Trajan (98–117) was still current and Pliny's letter to Trajan on the subject of Christian trials and execution closely reflects the structure of Margaret's trial: "Interrogavi ipsos an essent Christiani. Confitentes iterum ac tertio interrogavi supplicium minatus: perseverantes duci iussi."⁵⁸

Margaret is asked three times to renounce her faith and each time she is asked to worship the pagan gods of Olibrius; three times she refuses and three times she is tortured before she is sentenced to be executed. So it is Margaret's obstinate refusal to worship pagan gods that brings about her martyrdom, a refusal that would have been regarded as a political act in the late Imperial period; the incidental result of her religious conviction was the protection of her virginity. Therefore, the real threat to Margaret's virginity did not come from the expected antagonist, Olibrius, but rather from Margaret's supernatural opponents, the dragon-devil and a devil in the guise of a black man.⁵⁹ Margaret's encounters with devils in various guises could well have reminded the Christ Church monks of similar encounters endured by their community's monastic reformer Dunstan, who in the most famous incident grasped the devil's nose with tongs.⁶⁰

Both of the assaults on Margaret by the devils were regarded, in the

text, as attacks on Margaret's virginity.⁶¹ In the T version of the *Life*, the dragon swallows up Margaret, but she splits him in two by making the sign of the Cross. The black devil then appears and says,

Ic sende to þe Hrufum, minne broþur, on dracan gelicnesse, to þam þæt he þe forswulge and þinne mægþhad and þinne wlite forlure and þin gemynd of eorþan adylige. Þu hine þinne mid Cristes rodetacne acwealdest and nu þu wilt me acwyllan. Ac ic bidde þe for þinne mægþhad þæt þu me ne geswinge.⁶²

Margaret ignores the black devil's grovelling and instead (in the T version) grabs him by the hair and throws him to the ground, knocking out an eye and smashing all his bones in the process. She places her foot on his neck and says, "Leave my virginity alone" ("Gewit fram minum mægþhade").⁶³ Thus, Margaret counters both attacks by supernatural agents, which are construed as direct assaults against her virginity. While it is possible that being swallowed by the dragon can be seen as a metaphor for physical rape and the appeals by the black devil as a metaphor for seduction, there does seem to be more going on here than a simple metaphorical exchange. Margaret's virginity is treated not so much as a physical attribute but as a spiritual state innate within her, and this idea is fully developed with multiple allusions that place Margaret in *imitatio Christi* and seem to equate the power of her virginity with the power of Christ's divinity.

When Margaret is spotted by Olibrius and his soldiers seize her, she then uses several metaphors to suggest she is caught in a trap; as the version in T puts it, "I am now, Lord, like cattle in the midst of a field, like a sparrow in a net and like a fish on a hook."⁶⁴ To a learned religious audience the allusion to the theological premise of the Devil's mousetrap or fishhook would have been clear. Augustine expounded eloquently on this theme:

Trophaeo suo diabolus victus est. Exsultavit enim diabolus, quando hominem primum seducendo deiecit in mortem. Primum hominem seducendo occidit: occidendo novissimum, de laqueis primum perdidit ... Exsultavit diabolus, quando mortuus est Christus, et in ipsa morte Christi est diabolus victus; tamquam in muscipula escam accepit. Gaudebat ad mortem, quasi praepositus mortis; ad quod gaudebat, inde illi tensum est. Muscipula diaboli, crux Domini; esca qua caperetur, mors Domini.⁶⁵

As Christ's humanity was the trap for the Devil, Margaret's virginity was, in a similar fashion, dangled as bait for the devils. Augustine argues that the Lord's Cross, as a symbol of His human death, was the Devil's mousetrap, and when Margaret makes the sign of the Cross

inside the dragon's stomach, she similarly springs the trap that rends him in two.

The idea that Christ's humanity was a trap for the Devil would have been very familiar to a learned Anglo-Saxon audience not only through the writings of Augustine, but also as part of the theme of the Harrowing of Hell, which was most expansively described in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, a text known in England from an early time.⁶⁶ After the gates of Hell have been burst open, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* account continues:

Tunc Satan dixit ad infernum: "Praepara te ad recipiendum quem tibi deduxero. Dehinc infernus Satanae ita perintulit: Vox ista non fuit nisi a clamore filii patris altissimi, quia ita terra et omnia inferi loca sub ipsa contremuit: unde puto me at omnia vincula mea iam aperta patescere. Sed adiuro te, Satana, caput malorum omnium, per tuas measque virtutes, ne perducas eum ad me, ne dum velimus eum capere captivemur ab eo."⁶⁷

In the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, it was clearly a mistake for Satan to take Christ into Hell, and in a similar manner it was also a mistake for the dragon-devil to swallow Margaret. When Christ goes into Hell in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, it is said, "The Lord set his Cross in the midst of Hell, which is the sign of victory"; Margaret was victorious against the dragon through the sign of the Cross, and then the Cross appeared in the heavens as a sign of her ultimate victory.⁶⁸

The role of Margaret as *miles Christi* has been discussed by Clayton and Magennis, as have the connections to the Virgin Mary, particularly between Margaret having her foot on the neck of the black demon and the portrayal of the Virgin Mary with her foot on a serpent.⁶⁹ When we look outside of the canonical Gospels, the role of Margaret in *imitatio Christi*, becomes even more emphatic. When Margaret places her foot on the neck of the serpent, an audience familiar with the *Gospel of Nicodemus* may have seen this as an act in *imitatio Christi*:

Et ecce dominus Iesus Christus veniens in claritate excelsi luminis mansuetus, magnus et humilis, catenam suis deportans manibus Satan cum collo ligavit, et iterum a tergo ei religans manus resupinum eum elisit in tartarum, pedemque suum sanctum ei posuit in gutture, dicens "Per omnia secula multa mala fecisti, ullo modo non quievisti."⁷⁰

In the T version of her *Life*, after Margaret has the black devil under her foot, a white dove says, "Secg me, Margareta, þu þe þurh mægþhad gyrndest þæs eacan rices, and forþon hit biþ þe geseald mid Abraham and mid Isaac and Iacob, Eadig eart þu þe þone feond oferswipdest."⁷¹

It may strike a somewhat discordant note here that Margaret is granted the company of these three Old Testament patriarchs, but not the company of other Christian virgins, for example, Thecla and Susanna, with whom she is associated in chapters 1, 2, and 20.⁷² The Old Testament patriarchs, however, were released from Hell by Christ's actions in the Harrowing of Hell, and so mention of them here reinforces the connection between Christ's actions in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and Margaret's behaviour in *imitatio Christi*.

In the *Life* of Margaret the protective and redemptive role of the Cross is repeatedly emphasized and this is a theme that resonates strongly throughout several of the texts that would have had a monastic audience in T. The efficacy of the sign of the Cross to protect one against enemies, both visible and invisible, is an idea that occurs in T in monastic rule, liturgy, and private prayer.⁷³ The *Regularis Concordia* (fols 3r–27v in T), the English agreement on monastic practice established under King Edgar in c. 970, includes admonitions for daily and weekly recognitions of the Cross, as well as detailed instructions for its special adoration in the Good Friday Service, which includes three prayers specifically dedicated to the Cross.⁷⁴ In two other places within T, these three Good Friday prayers from the *Regularis Concordia* are adapted as the basis for private devotions focused on the Cross for the use of the religious.⁷⁵ The first of these adaptations of the Good Friday prayers is collated with four other private devotions to the Cross, which together emphasize both the soteriological and apotropaic aspects of the Cross.⁷⁶ The Cross devotions are in Latin and psalms are referenced only by their incipit, and so we can conclude they were used by the professional religious, not by the laity.⁷⁷ The Cross-related elements of the *Life* of Margaret would be understood acutely by a religious audience as part of their burgeoning cult of the Cross, which was centred on private devotion. Margaret is intimately linked to the Cross in several ways: immediately on incarceration she blesses herself with the sign of the Cross;⁷⁸ when she makes the sign of the Cross inside the dragon it splits him in two;⁷⁹ and when she has the black devil underfoot and warns it to leave her virginity alone, “there shone a very great light in the dark prison and the cross of Christ could be seen stretching from earth to heaven.”⁸⁰ Then, as she is led out to be tortured again the next day, “she blessed all her body with the sign of Christ's cross.”⁸¹ Finally, when a dove delivers the heavenly response to Margaret's final prayer, it appears bearing a cross.⁸² Margaret, the Cross, and her virginity are linked as intimately in her *Life*, as Christ, the Cross, and his divinity are linked in the redacted version of Ælfric's Homily for Palm Sunday, which succeeds the *Life* in this manuscript. This connection between virginity, Cross, and salvation would have no

doubt resounded loudly with Christ Church's monastic community, who were encouraged to embrace chastity with renewed vigour.

A cult of Margaret seems to have been developing at Christ Church in this period, probably based on the recent acquisition of her relics. Margaret's relics were translated from the east in 908 and came to rest at San Pietro della Valle near Lake Bolsena, a pilgrimage rest-stop frequented by Englishmen on their way to Rome, including Archbishop Sigeric (990–994) when he went to Rome to receive his pallium in 990.⁸³ If Archbishop Sigeric did manage to secure relics of Margaret during his stay at San Pietro della Valle, it would be surprising if he did not keep at least one relic for his own see.

In T there is other evidence, besides Margaret's *Life*, that Margaret was singled out for special devotion at Christ Church and that a cult might have been forming there. In the litany in T (fols 122v–113r), there are only three names given in capitals, those of Margaret and the canonized archbishops, Augustine and Dunstan. This is, indeed, a rare honour, which places Margaret's significance even above that of the order's founder, Benedict. That there was something special about the status of Margaret at Christ Church in the early eleventh century is also attested by a notation in the Arundel Psalter, another Christ Church manuscript of this period; the notation in its calendar next to Margaret's feast day, which reads “xii lc,” indicates that Margaret was singled out for the special adoration of a full mass of twelve lections at Christ Church.⁸⁴ Helmut Gneuss raises the question of why Margaret should have received this particular kind of devotion at Christ Church, commenting,

By the time Tiberius A.iii was written the cult of St Margaret had become widespread in England, and there were relics of her in several places. If such relics could be shown to have existed in pre-Conquest Canterbury, an explanation for the saint's entry in the Tiberius litany and for the inclusion of her Old English life might be found.⁸⁵

While clear-cut evidence of a relic of Margaret at pre-Conquest Christ Church is still to be found, I would like to proffer a suggestion. Waltham Abbey owned Margaret's girdle in the fourteenth century, which had been donated along with strips of the chasubles of Ælfheah and Dunstan (among other relics) by the prior of St Gregory's, Canterbury.⁸⁶ St Gregory's, which was founded by Lanfranc in 1085 as a community of secular clerks, would have received the relics of Ælfheah and Dunstan from Christ Church; is it possible, therefore, that they also received Margaret's girdle from Christ Church?⁸⁷

Several other houses claimed to possess relics of Margaret: Bath

owned an unspecified relic of *sancta Margetan* in the time of Abbot Ælfsige (c.1076–1087).⁸⁸ New Minster, Winchester, also includes unspecified entries for Margaret in two of its six relics lists.⁸⁹ Most significantly, Exeter, in its two Latin relics lists, claims to have *De Capite Sancte Margaret virginis*.⁹⁰ Exeter, therefore, claimed to have in its possession Margaret’s head, which the version of her *Life* in T very specifically states was taken into heaven by angels:

Da coman englas and genaman hire heafod on hira fædmum, and hi sungon and cwædon: “Ðu halga, þu halga, þu halga, Drihten God, weoroda Wuldorkynning, fulle syndon heofonas and eorþan þines wuldres.” And þus singende hi hit gesætton on neorxnawonge. And ealle þa þe wannhale wæron, healtte and blinde, dumbe and deafe, and hi onhrinon þære halgan fæmnan lichaman, ealle hi wurdon gehælde.⁹¹

In the version in BnF, lat. 5574, however, the angels come down and take Margaret’s whole body “above the clouds”;⁹² while in the CCCC 303 version the angels come and take away only Margaret’s soul.⁹³ This disagreement about a crucial part of the story might relate not just to theological arguments about bodily assumption, but also to rivalry between the different claimants of Margaret’s relics. Perhaps, what can be witnessed here is a rivalry between two centres that were developing cults of Margaret. Did the Benedictines of Christ Church explicitly choose a version of Margaret’s *Life* that denied the authenticity of relics of Margaret venerated by the secular clerks at Exeter? While it is possible, of course, that it is just a coincidence that the extant Christ Church version of Margaret’s *Life* specifically denies the genuine status of the relics held by another community, it is tempting to see here some agency on the part of the Christ Church redactor of the text, who chose to cast doubt on a rival cult centre.

The question posed in the title of this chapter – “Why Is Margaret’s the Only *Life* in London, BL, Cotton Tiberius A.iii?” – can be answered only by examining its manuscript context and the interests of the community that produced that manuscript. For lay teaching, it is a prime example of the good Christian life and the fully formed Christian conscience, which fits in well with the pastoral message of the manuscript’s homilies and confessional directives. The laity were exhorted to behave in their ordinary lives in the same manner that Margaret had behaved in her extraordinary *Life*: to love God, shun the Devil, and obey the Church, while relying on the sign of the Cross for protection from enemies, visible and invisible. Margaret, a young woman abandoned by her father, occupied what the Anglo-Saxons would probably have considered the most precarious position in

society. Nevertheless, she was able to rise above the calamities of her abandonment, her persecution by enemies, and even direct conflict with devils, to fulfil her obligations as a Christian; even the black devil acknowledges as much when he says, “Yet now I have been overcome by a young girl.”⁹⁴ For the monks of Christ Church, use of allusions to both the canonical gospels and the *Gospel of Nicodemus* would have taken the message of Margaret’s *Life* to a higher level, and they are reminded that, like Margaret’s, their ultimate thoughts should always be about facilitating the salvation of the laity. Read against the background of Christ Church as a monastic-cathedral, we can see how both the laity of Kent and the monastic community of Christ Church could benefit from the contemplation of Margaret’s *Life*, although each might take away different things from it. When the manuscript context is considered, we can see that the T version of the *Life* of Margaret was chosen, and probably adapted, for inclusion in this manuscript because it served two allied functions: first, it formed part of a practical and simple catechism for the laity in which only one exemplary *Life* was required; and second, it inspired the monks of Christ Church to perform their duties in imitation of Margaret’s commitment to virginity, devotion to the Cross, and facilitation of the salvation of others.

4 Æthelgifu's Will as Hagiography

MARY LOUISE FELLOWS

Introduction

This chapter contests two conventional distinctions found in Anglo-Saxon scholarship. First, it challenges the stark differentiation scholars typically draw between the late Anglo-Saxon saints' lives concerning holy men and those concerning holy women. A reading of the saints' lives with a focus on chastity and a life devoted to *imitatio Christi* demonstrates how late Anglo-Saxon clerics thought more in terms of gender congruency than gender hierarchy.¹ Second, it re-examines Anglo-Saxonists' tendencies to treat charters, especially those collected under the rubric of Anglo-Saxon wills, as unrelated to the spiritual literature written near and around the same time, especially saints' lives. Anglo-Saxon saints' lives establish models for how a Christian should live in the temporal world in order to achieve eternal salvation. Anglo-Saxon wills represent Christians' final statements in the temporal world of why they deserve life after death.

A comparison of Ælfric of Eynsham's second life of Martin and his life of Eugenia, both of which are found in *Lives of Saints (LS)*, reveals significant insights about the spiritual understanding of gender in the late Anglo-Saxon period.² As this chapter draws parallels between the two lives, it situates Ælfric's treatment of gender in the broader context of his other writings. The first thing to notice about gender differentiation in Ælfric's saints' lives, that is to say, the distinction between men and women, is that it functions in complicated and contradictory ways. The lives reflect fluctuating gender roles. At the same time, however, the lives sharply regulate gender differences. An investigation of Ælfric's *LS* Martin along with his life of *LS* Eugenia explains why holiness understood exclusively in terms of manly and womanly attributes inevitably fails to appreciate that the vow of chastity has little to do with suppression of desire. It has more to do with transcendence of the physical and attainment of a disembodied spirituality.³

This chapter goes on to compare the complicated treatment of gender and chastity in these two saints' lives with the roles gender and chastity play in the late tenth-century will of Æthelgifu, a wealthy

widow.⁴ As Ælfric states in his Old English Preface, he wrote his *LS* for his two lay patrons, Æthelwerd and Æthelmær. He explains that he chose to translate from Latin to Old English those lives of the saints whom monks honour among themselves.⁵ Ælfric's transfer of monastic values and culture to the laity through his vernacular rendition of saints' lives makes his representations of holiness and chastity especially conducive to this chapter, as it links secular writings and non-secular documents in its consideration of Anglo-Saxons' understanding of gender and chastity. Through this juxtaposition, the chapter shows how the one genre enhances an understanding of the other, how chastity plays a central role in both genres, and how chastity bridges the differences between genres and between genders in Anglo-Saxon England.

LS Martin

In *LS Martin*, Ælfric, following the writings of Sulpicius Severus, sets forth a life that defines manhood for a Christian.⁶ While Martin's father holds military service in high regard, Ælfric, replicating Sulpicius, establishes new paths to manhood.⁷ Although acknowledging that Martin "gewenod to wæpnum fram cildhade" [was accustomed to weapons from childhood], that is, he could meet the definition of pagan manhood, Ælfric prefers to emphasize that Martin chose instead to devote himself "to godcundlicum þeowdome" [to divine service], not "to woruldlicum campdome" [to worldly warfare].⁸ Hugh Magennis recognizes that Sulpicius's account of Martin shows considerable ambivalence concerning Martin's military activities and ultimately presents him "as a kind of nonviolent soldier."⁹ However, Magennis, detects an even greater insistence in Ælfric's *LS Martin* that the saint, as a soldier, remained beyond the "woruldlicre besmitennysse" [worldly defilement]¹⁰ associated with war and warfare.¹¹ Magennis attributes Ælfric's response to the military aspects of Martin's life to his interest in highlighting Martin's sanctity, but it also has the effect of reconfiguring the meaning of manhood.¹² De-emphasis of military exploits opens up the possibility for the injection of new criteria for judging the worth of a man.¹³

Ælfric's rejection of domineering notions of manliness emerges when, for example, he makes pagan manhood suspect by reporting how Martin's father betrayed his son and forced him into military service.¹⁴ Ælfric also emphasizes that pagan men revered Martin for what is atypical conduct for a pagan man; that is to say, Ælfric introduced new criteria to determine manliness. In fact, Ælfric states explicitly that the other men respected Martin for his monk-like conduct. He had

“gemetfæst geðyld / and soðe eadmodnysse ofer mennisc gemett. / Swa micele forhæfednysse he hæfde on his bigleofan / swilce he munuc wære swiðor þonne cempa / and for his æðelum þeawum his efencempan ealle / þa hine arwurðodon mid wundorlicre lufe.”¹⁵ Ælfric’s description of Martin after he became bishop, which is more extensive than that of Sulpicius, reconfigures manhood to include the attributes of the ideal monk.

He wæs soðfæst on dome and estful on bodunge
arwurðful on þeawum and þurhwacol on gebedum
singal on rædinge gestæððig on his lece
arfæst on gewilnunge and arwurðful on his þenungum.
Eala hwilc welwillendnys wæs on his spræcum
and hwilc geþungennys wæs on his þeawum
and hu micel glædnys on gastlicum dædum
wunode on þam halgan mid healicre fremminge.
Eadig wæs se wer on þam ne wunode nan facn
nænne he ne forðemde ne nanum he ne forgeald
yfel mid yfele ac he eaðelice forbær
manna teonrædene mid micclum geþylde.
Ne geseah hine nan man nateshwon yrr
ne on mode murcnigende ne mislice geworhtne
ac on anre anrædnysse æfre wunigende
ofer mannes gemet mid mycelre glædnysse.¹⁶

As the life unfolds, helmets and shields, the mark of manhood in the pagan world, give way to a monastic habit. That garb comes to stand for an alternative path to manhood within Christianity.

Nevertheless, Ælfric still finds a number of ways to have the saint project those manly attributes more closely associated with warfare. On the eve of battle, Martin describes himself to the emperor Julian as “godes cempa,” meaning god’s warrior, and, therefore, unwilling to engage in earthly warfare.¹⁷ When Julian charges Martin with cowardice, Martin responds by offering to go into battle “orsorh” [without heed] and with only the sign of the Cross as protection.¹⁸ Martin’s strong stance against Julian, accompanied by audacious rhetoric, links his strong faith to valour. Later in the life, he also bravely challenges a madman possessed by the devil, when everyone else has fled in fear.¹⁹ Another telling episode concerns a soldier who wanted to lay down his weapons and become a monk.²⁰ When that soldier, now monk, insisted to Martin that he wanted to have “his wif him to geferan” [his wife with him as a companion], Martin uses the

battlefield and military tradition to convince the man that his manhood as a monk depends on his ability to live without his wife as he practises a chaste life.²¹ Martin says, “sege me ic þe axige gif þu æfre wære / oððe on gefeohte oþþe on ænigum truman” [tell me, I ask of thee, if thou hast ever been / either in battle or in any cohort], and the man responds that he has been in both.²² Then Martin asks the man, “Gesawe þu ænig wif þa ðu wære on gefeohte / feohtan forð mid eow atogenum swurde?” [Sawest though any woman when thou wast in battle / fighting beside you with drawn sword?].²³ After these questions, Ælfric goes on to report that the monk saw his error, making it clear that, just as a soldier enters a secular battle without his wife by his side, he must enter his spiritual battle without her comfort or assistance.

In addition, Ælfric preserves the association of manhood with superiority by carefully distinguishing between humility and humiliation.²⁴ In contrast to Sulpicius, Ælfric rigorously discerns which details of Martin’s life he has to relate for the purpose of demonstrating this saint’s humility and those that he should avoid because they suggest the saint’s humiliation. Karin E. Olsen attributes Ælfric’s concern for Martin’s dignity to the fact that the saint ultimately accepted the high-status position of bishop.²⁵ Even if Olsen’s explanation for the divergences in the two lives of Martin is not wholly persuasive, Ælfric’s efforts to “play down any of the saint’s self-humiliating acts” suggest his continuing reliance on conventional notions of manhood.²⁶ Ælfric accepts humility, but not humiliation, as a criterion for Christian manhood.²⁷

Life of Eugenia

A Comparison with LS Martin

A consideration of Ælfric’s life of Eugenia alongside *LS Martin* reveals how, as Ælfric strives in *LS* to establish the ideal Christian, he matches a shifting definition of manhood with a shifting definition of womanhood.²⁸ In one respect, the similarities between the two stories reveal no surprises, given that many saints’ lives contain predictable motifs. The fact that the motifs are similar for these disparate lives, however, contributes to a reading of Ælfric’s *LS* as disrupting gender differentiation. Eugenia too is born into a noble pagan family, and she also is precocious in her interest in Christian doctrine. Like Martin, she wants to follow the monastic life and finds the need to shed her pagan garb; rather than taking off a helmet and shield, she removes the apparel appropriate for a noble pagan woman. Like Martin, she dons

the habit of a monk, and also, like Martin, she represents the ideal monk.²⁹ As Ælfric writes, she “heold on hyre þeawum halige drohtnunge / ðurh modes līþnesse and mycelre eaðmodnesse” [observed in her conduct the holy service / with gentleness of mind and great humility].³⁰ Like Martin, she is chosen as a religious leader – not a bishop (that would stretch the bounds of gender differentiation too much), but an abbot. Like Martin, she heals the infirm and drives away devils. While she is in a monk’s habit, her life mirrors that of the famous Bishop of Tours. Even after Eugenia sheds her disguise, their lives continue along parallel paths. Her martyrdom matches Martin’s identification with Christ, marked most obviously in *LS* Martin by the famous scene in which he shares his cloak with a beggar. Both lives demonstrate each saint’s strong faith. They also present the gendered natures of the two saints in nearly indistinguishable terms.

The one exception to an androgynous reading of the two lives is that Ælfric emphasizes Eugenia’s virginity and virtually ignores Martin’s. Ælfric does not mention Martin’s virginity except to say that Martin was “arfæst on gewilnunge” [virtuous in desire].³¹ However, virginity plays a central role in his telling of Eugenia’s life.³² Although it is tempting to use this distinction in the two lives as evidence that Ælfric defines women only in terms of their sexuality, a more generous reading of the life of Eugenia warrants consideration. For Ælfric, *imitatio Christi* seems to have two components. First, it requires manhood to be broadened to include prayer, reading, humility, and patience. The abandonment of marks of aggression, whether on the battlefield or otherwise, makes *imitatio Christi* available to both men and women. Without this first step, the possibility of a woman’s attaining true holiness would be unthinkable. The second component – virginity – is of equal concern to both men and women and exceeds issues of gender, notwithstanding that Ælfric focuses on virginity most prominently in his lives of the women saints.

Gopa Roy’s comparison of the Latin versions Ælfric likely used as his source with Ælfric’s own life of Eugenia provides further support for the contention that Ælfric embraces gender congruency, rather than gender hierarchy, as he sets out criteria of *imitatio Christi*.³³ In the various Latin versions, Eugenia in the speech accompanying her revelation of her breast articulates the “idea of male superiority and female inferiority” when she says:³⁴ “nolui esse feminam. Consideravi enim non esse inimicam honestatis simulationem per quam femina virum simulat, sed magis hoc iure puniri, si pro affectu vitiorum vir feminam fingat. Et hoc iure laudandum, si pro amore virtutum sexus infirmior virilem gloriam imitetur.”³⁵ In contrast, Ælfric does not dwell on Eugenia’s manly behaviour, but instead focuses on her virginity, as

is demonstrated by his use of indirect speech (a typical Ælfrician technique), when Eugenia defends herself against the accusations of Melantia, a wealthy, lascivious widow:³⁶ “Eugenia seo æbele fæmne / cwæð þæt heo wolde hi sylfe bediglian / and criste anum hyre clænnysse healdan / on mægðhade wuniende mannum uncuð / and forðy underfænge æt fruman þa gyrlan / wærlices hades and wurde geefsod.”³⁷ In the words of Clare A. Lees, it is “the transformed body, not the sexed one” that becomes the universalized “exemplar” for men and women alike.³⁸ Allen J. Frantzen makes a similar argument in his analysis of the lives of cross-dressing saints: “The women who, in order to become holy, cannot remain women are not alone. They are ‘manly’ in giving up their sex, for that is what the *real* men [monks] ... have already done. Real men finally transcend the body altogether, a performative gesture of their own, a repeated and ceaseless denial of the male body. As the first step in that process, their female counterparts must escape the female body by becoming manly; only then are they holy enough to die as women.”³⁹ True holiness demands transcendence of “human identity” itself.⁴⁰

The shadowy role that eunuchs play in the life of Eugenia underscores the notion of the saint as desexed body and the associated idea of virginity.⁴¹ The eunuchs, Protus and Jacinctus, accompany Eugenia as she learns Latin and Greek, seeks knowledge about Christ, and abandons her pagan life for the monastery.⁴² Ælfric honours Protus and Jacinctus by referring to them as saints and worthy martyrs, based on their faithfulness to Eugenia and their conversion efforts. He carefully avoids suggesting any heretical connection between their earthly holiness and status as eunuchs.⁴³ Nevertheless, Protus and Jacinctus as eunuchs reinforce Ælfric’s efforts to demonstrate how true holiness transcends sexual identity and ultimately human identity.

My alternative reading of Martin and Eugenia still allows room for sharply regulated gender roles. Martin and his followers, as men in the temporal world, have the power to redefine manhood to match their Christian beliefs. Women in *LS* Martin do not have that luxury. The life defines them in terms of their relation to men – wives in association with their husbands, daughters with their fathers, widows with their sons. Further, it portrays them as being under men’s control, such as when it reports that a father commits his daughter to a monastery in thanks to Martin for his miracle of healing her.⁴⁴ In the life of Eugenia, Melantia, unconstrained by any man, represents wickedness and stands in stark contrast to Claudia, Eugenia’s mother, who performs good works in the name of her new found faith after her husband (Eugenia’s father) is martyred. In short, efforts to simplify gender through consideration of Ælfric’s *LS* are bound to fail; efforts to complicate it

uncover an *imitatio Christi* that transcends the physical and coalesces into a disembodied spirituality.

A Comparison with Ælfric's Other Writings

The turning point in Ælfric's life of Eugenia comes when she exposes her breasts at her trial, in which Melantia has accused Eugenia of having made sexual advances. At that moment, Eugenia emerges from her male disguise to reunite with her family. As important, her family joins in her efforts to convert others to Christianity. To see Eugenia's disrobing as equating the female with breasts underestimates the powerfulness of the scene.⁴⁵ When she bares her breasts, she shows herself to be a woman and also reveals her deepest faith.

Ælfric's life of Agatha supports the view that Eugenia's disrobing reflects Ælfric's understanding of the perfect ungendered Christian.⁴⁶ In the life of Agatha, the ruler of Sicily, Quintianus, gives the responsibility of corrupting Agatha to Aphrodosia. She tells the ruler that "stanas magon hnexian and þæt starce ísen / on leades gelicnysse ærðan þe se geleafa mæge / of agathes breoste beon æfre adwæsced."⁴⁷ Her words foreshadow the vicious removal of Agatha's breast that occurs later. Aphrodosia's words make it clear that the mutilation of Agatha's body represents the heathen's failed attempt to take away Agatha's faith. Agatha's own words to her torturer also make manifest that failure: "Ic habbe mine breost on minre sawle ansunde / mid þam ðe Ic min andgit eallunga afede."⁴⁸ A messenger from God, who later literally restores the breast, further underscores the constancy of Agatha's faith.⁴⁹

Ælfric's description of the revelation of Christ's holiness to Longinus in "Exaltatio Sancte Crucis" also strengthens the correlation of breasts to true holiness and blunts the sexual connotations generally associated with breasts.⁵⁰ Longinus is the centurion who pierces Christ in the side during his crucifixion. As the earth shakes and darkness lasts for three hours, starting at midday, Longinus turns towards Christ and "sleande his breost" [smiting his breast] says, "Uere filius dei est hic" [Truly this (man) is the Son of God].⁵¹ Eugenia's trial scene set beside Longinus's conversion at Christ's crucifixion confirms that her uncovered breasts do not sexualize her, but rather ally her with *imitatio Christi*.⁵²

Moreover, when Ælfric addresses male chastity in his homilies, he emphasizes the ideal Christian and de-emphasizes gender differences. In "Dominica in Sexagesima," Ælfric writes about how a life of virginity can "bringað forð hundfealdne wæstm" [bring forth fruit a hundredfold] to "godes ðeowum and ðinenum" [God's servants and

maidservants].⁵³ He goes on in this homily to underscore the importance of chastity for both laymen and clerics.⁵⁴ In “In Purificatione Sanctae Mariae,” Ælfric writes that “þry hadas syndon þe cyðdon gecyðnesse be criste þæt is mæ[i]gðhad 7 wydeþan had 7 riht sinscype.”⁵⁵ He then clarifies this statement: “Mæigðhad is ægðer ge on wæpmannum ge on wimmannum. Þa habbað rihtne mæigðhad þa ðe fram cyldhade wuniað on clænnysse. 7 ealle galnyssa on him sylfum forseoð æigðer ge modes ge lichaman.”⁵⁶ These homilies, read together with his saints’ lives, demonstrate how the attributes of the ideal Christian, without concern for gender, play a central role in Ælfric’s writings.

Ælfric’s homily “Dominica in Media Quadragesima” may seem to support an argument that he embraces gender hierarchy and has little interest in transcending sexual identity. This homily concerns Christ’s miracle of the two fishes and five loaves, about which John writes (6:1–14). In it, Ælfric directly quotes from I Corinthians 16:13 (“vigilate state in fide viriliter agite et confortamini”)⁵⁷: “Ðær wæron getealde æt þam gereorde fif þusend wera for ðan þe ða menn þe to ðan gastlican gereorde belimpað sceolon beon werlice geworhte. Swa swa se apostol cwæð; He cwæð beoð wacole 7 standað on geleafan 7 onginnað werlice 7 beoð gehyrte; þeah gif wifman bið werlice geworht 7 strang to godes willan heo bið þonne geteald to ðam werum þe æt godes mysan sittað.”⁵⁸ Roy usefully compares Ælfric’s homily with the one on the same subject by the Venerable Bede, which served as Ælfric’s source.⁵⁹ After recognizing that “the words of both Bede and Ælfric imply received prejudices about masculine and feminine,” she observes that Ælfric seems to “be more sensitive to the difficulty inherent in the application of *werlice* to women as well as men, since he takes the trouble to draw attention to the metaphorical and more inclusive meaning of the word.” Bede provides no explanation, presumably because the term “viriliter” normally carries the meaning of courageously.⁶⁰ Ælfric’s use of the male as the norm, even within the context of his expanded definition of manliness, may suggest that he is enforcing a gender hierarchy. Once this homily is situated in the context of his other writings pertaining to holiness and chastity, a fairer conclusion about Ælfric’s views concerning male dominance is that it does not preoccupy him.

Æthelgifu’s Will

The comparison of *LS* Martin with *LS* Eugenia illuminates chastity as an essential component of Ælfric’s Christian ideal and as a construct that goes beyond gender differentiation. A further comparison of these two

lives with Æthelgifu's will uncover striking similarities between the two genres once chastity and *imitatio Christi* eclipse Æthelgifu's extraordinary wealth as interpretative criteria. This chapter focuses on Æthelgifu's late-tenth-century will, because its exceptional length (4,000 words) and detail allow for a sustained analysis to show its spiritual dimension. While Ælfric chronicles why the faithful should honour Martin and Eugenia, Æthelgifu in her will makes the case for why she deserves, as Ælfric would have put it, to be "æt godes mysan" [at the table of God].⁶¹ In effect, her will serves as a self-published hagiography in which she documents a life devoted to *imitatio Christi*.

Scholars who have combed through charters, chronicles, and other Anglo-Saxon materials have not been able to recover any biographical information about Æthelgifu beyond what they can surmise from the provisions of her will: she was a wealthy Christian widow who had significant connections to royalty and religious foundations, particularly the reformed monastery of St Albans.⁶² For many Anglo-Saxon scholars, her will serves as evidence that Anglo-Saxon women held significant legal status, as they wielded economic power.⁶³ A sustained focus on the will's religious provisions and on its clues suggesting Æthelgifu had taken a vow of chastity prevents the economic import of the will from overshadowing its spiritual dimensions. The significance of Æthelgifu's will changes once attention is paid to how the ideal of chastity may have influenced her will and her life. The basis for a refocus to the spiritual dimensions of her will initially emanates from prevailing Anglo-Saxon iconography that links testaments, chastity, and *imitatio Christi*. Scrutiny of the text of Æthelgifu's will shows how it reflects many aspects of that iconography. A consideration of the saints' lives of Martin and Eugenia in conjunction with the will also enhances an understanding of how and why Æthelgifu presents herself in her will as a chaste widow worthy of everlasting life.

Iconography from tenth- and eleventh-century England primarily portrays Mary and John the Evangelist at the crucifixion to the exclusion of other figures or details. Neither continental artists during the same period nor Anglo-Saxon artists from earlier periods emphasized this particular approach to the crucifixion; instead, they used a wider range of iconographic designs in their portrayals.⁶⁴ The near-exclusive inclusion of Mary and John in representations of the crucifixion probably derives from John's Gospel and Ambrose's commentary on Luke's Gospel.⁶⁵ John is the only one of the evangelists who describes the conversation Christ has with Mary and John from the cross. Ambrose makes it clear that he prefers John's Gospel, in which Christ directs Mary to take John as her son and John to take

Mary as his mother (19:26–7), to the Gospels of the other evangelists, who wrote of the repentant thief. Of more pertinence to the study of Anglo-Saxon wills, Ambrose treats Christ’s words as the equivalent of a will: “Testabatur de cruce Christus et testamentum eius signabat Iohannes, dignus tanto testatore testis. Bonum testamentum non pecuniae, sed uitae, quod non atramento scribitur, sed spiritu dei uiui. *Lingua mea calamus scribae uelociter scribentis.*”⁶⁶ Ambrose’s commentary on Luke’s Gospel and the crucifixion iconography associate the Anglo-Saxon will with scriptural authority and Christ’s own *bonum testamentum*.⁶⁷

The virgin figures of Mary and John included in the crucifixion scenes further enhance the spirituality associated with the Anglo-Saxon will. Barbara C. Raw suggests that, within the monasteries that produced and used the illustrations for meditation and prayer, the iconography would have served “as a reminder to those who had chosen a celibate life of the value Christ placed on virginity.”⁶⁸ Ambrose himself expanded on the meaning of Christ’s words beyond their honouring his mother.⁶⁹ He believed that they proved Mary’s virginity. The idea that Christ, Mary, and John were bound by their virginity apparently circulated as a common theme in monastic writing. For example, Ælfric, in his homily on the Assumption, writes: “drihten þurh his arfæstnysse betæhte þæt eadige mæden his cennestran þam clænan men iohanne se ðe on clænum mægðhade symle wunode. ⁊ he for þy synderlice þam drihtne leof wæs to þan swiðe þæt he him þone deorwurðan maðm ealles middaneardes cwene betæcan wolde; Gewislice þæt hire clænesta mægðhad þam clænan men gepeod wære mid gecwemre geferrædene on wynsumre drohtnunge.”⁷⁰ The crucifixion iconography of the late Anglo-Saxon period situated within relevant exegeses infuses Anglo-Saxon wills with spirituality and relates that spirituality to chastity. In addition, it buttresses this chapter’s objective to show a connection between Anglo-Saxon wills and Anglo-Saxon saints’ lives with their focus on *imitatio Christi*.

Æthelgifu’s will lends itself easily to the chastity and steadfastness themes that permeate the saints’ lives. Mary is the one saint that the will especially singles out. It calls on the king and queen “for godes lufan ⁊ for sancte marigan” [for the love of God and St Mary] to “ne læton nænne monnan, mid feo hire cwide awendan” [allow no man, for money, to change her will].⁷¹ The form of this plea to uphold Æthelgifu’s will reflects the veneration Mary garnered in late Anglo-Saxon England and bolsters the view that chastity served a pivotal function in the lives of the faithful.⁷²

The manumission in her will of three women on the condition that

they sing the psalter each week for a year following her death provides substantial evidence of Æthelgifu's chastity: "¶ ælfwaru ... [is to be freed] on þæt gerad þe heo singe ælcere wucan .iiii. sealtreas binnan .xxx. nihtan ¶ on xii. monðum. ælcere wucan sealtre ¶ freoge mon leofrune on þæt ilce rad ¶ æþelflæde."⁷³ They, along with Æthelgifu, would have constituted a religious congregation served by her priests.⁷⁴ Dorothy Whitelock, based on this provision in Æthelgifu's will, has surmised that she "followed a practice common among widows at that time, of taking a vow not to remarry and living a religious life at home, without entering a nunnery."⁷⁵ The ecclesiastical authorities in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries favoured widows' not remarrying and, in fact, encouraged them to model themselves according to the biblical widows, Anna and Judith, both of whom lived chastely and devoutly until their deaths.⁷⁶ Æthelred II's fifth law code, which he issued early in the eleventh century with the guidance of Archbishop Wulfstan of York, suggests that widows engendered anxiety among Anglo-Saxons.⁷⁷ The law code assures that no woman remains without male protection, but it conditions protection of a widow on her conducting herself appropriately. It expressly provides the protection of God and king to widows who conduct themselves "mid rihte" [rightly] and further provides that a widow should remain unmarried for a year and then choose for herself whether to remarry.⁷⁸ Whitelock may be correct that Æthelgifu's decision to take the vow of chastity was a way for her to maintain economic control over her property and avoid suitors interested in her wealth.⁷⁹ The fact that Æthelgifu seems not to have forgone material luxury or social interaction with her relations and the royal court, even as she seems to have embraced what Church Fathers consider the major component of the ascetic life – sexual abstinence – would provide further evidence that her vow strategically protected her economic power.⁸⁰ In addition, as other scholars have recognized in their study of women from late antiquity and the medieval period who embraced virginity, "the rejection of the bodily thus permitted widows and virgins certain kinds of choice and certain kinds of autonomy; their exile from the sexual community, real or figurative, accompanied by their special access to the divine, created spaces for self-articulation."⁸¹ That Æthelgifu's decision to take a vow of chastity gave her greater freedom does not negate the possibility of her own deep spiritual commitment to her becoming, in accordance with Ælfric's homily, "werlice geworht ¶ strang to godes willan" [manly by nature, and strong to God's will] so that she too could sit "æt godes mysan" [at the table of God].⁸²

Æthelgifu's substantial gifts to religious institutions, in fact, integrally relate to her commitment to chastity and devotion to *imitatio*

Christi. Christ's *bonum testamentum*, as Ambrose recognized, has to do with the family of Christians. Relying on Christ's words from the Cross, Ambrose relates Mary to the Church and John to a Christian believer: "Eris filius tonitruui, si fueris filius ecclesiae. Dicat et tibi de patibulo crucis Christus: *ecce mater tua*, dicat et ecclesiae: *ecce filius tuus*; tunc enim incipies esse filius ecclesiae, cum in cruce uictorem uideris Christum."⁸³ The identification of Mary as the Church and John as the Christian connects Æthelgifu's will with Christ's *bonum testamentum* precisely because Æthelgifu makes manifest her faith through her material gifts. Through a will that gives St Albans "twa sealfrene cuppan ⁊ twegen hornas ⁊ ane boc ⁊ þæt betste wahrift ⁊ þæt betste setrægl for hio ⁊ for hire hlafordes sawle" [two silver cups and two horns and one book and the best wall-hanging and the best seat-cover, for her and for her lord's soul] or directs Ælfwold, the beneficiary of her land at Munden, to send to the minster Braughing "ælcce leng ... vi. mittan mealtes ⁊ þær meolo to ⁊ fisc" [every Lent six measures of malt, and meal and fish], Æthelgifu fuses wealth and spirituality.⁸⁴ As she directs her material wealth to the support of the Church (Mary) through gifts to St Albans and a minster, Æthelgifu is obeying Christ's words to John. The religious purposes of her will transform it from a *testamentum pecuniae* to a *testamentum vitae*, namely, life after death.⁸⁵

Even as she tries to overcome gender differentiation in her will by presenting her life as one devoted to *imitatio Christi*, Æthelgifu nevertheless presents herself as a devoted and obedient wife. In this regard, the will closely mimics the complicated gender roles identified earlier in *LS* Martin and *LS* Eugenia.⁸⁶ Provisions in Æthelgifu's will that indicate the strict regulation of gender differences operate in tandem with the inferences in her will of her chastity and devotion to *imitatio Christi*. In a society where widows had only a precarious hold on respectability, as demonstrated by the Melantia/Claudia dyad in Ælfric's life of Eugenia, it is not surprising that Æthelgifu's will takes on a subservient cast. Throughout the will strategic references to her husband result in Æthelgifu's presenting herself as a woman worthy of having her will obeyed, that is to say, a widow who continued to care for and follow her husband's wishes. In return for property or manumission, she asks priests and other religious groups to pray for her soul and also the soul of her husband, as is demonstrated in her gift of the land at Standon to St Albans: "⁊ þæt lond æt standune [is to be given to] leofsige ... his dæg ⁊ æfter his dæge sylle hit man alfwolde ofor heora dæg into *sancte albane* ⁊ hy gesingon for hy ⁊ for hire hlafordes sawle ælcce gere xxx. mæssana. ⁊ xxx. saltera. ⁊ æfre þa munecas his brucen gemenelice."⁸⁷ She justifies her request to the king and queen to ensure that her dispositive wishes prevail by stating that

she is exercising her judgment with the blessings of her husband: “Hit becwæð hire hlaford hire to sellanne þam þe hyo wolde” [Her lord bequeathed it for her to give to whom she wished].⁸⁸ When she signifies her continuing loyalty to her husband or aligns her interests with his, Æthelgifu successfully places her will under his auspices.

Representations in the will of Æthelgifu transcending gender identity coexist with evidence of gender hierarchy. The will indicates that she accepts her wealth in much the same way as Eugenia embraces her monastic garb. She states in her will that “eall se freot ⁊ eall seo ælmesse þe her gecweden is hyo wile þæt hit beo heore ælMESSA for þon hit wæron hire hlafordes begeto” [all the manumission and all the almsgiving which is stated here she wishes to be her alms because they were her lord’s acquisitions].⁸⁹ In a sense, especially when placed within the context of almsgiving, Æthelgifu wears her husband’s wealth for the same reason that Eugenia wears a monk’s robe; it allows both to be “werlice geworht” [manfully constituted] in pursuit of their Christian faith.⁹⁰ A close reading of Ælfric’s *LS* Martin and Eugenia alongside Æthelgifu’s will suggests why the monks of St Albans would have willingly honoured Æthelgifu in their masses and prayers. They would have done so not merely because she was a wealthy widow who remained loyal to her late husband, but because she also showed herself to be a woman devoted to *imitatio Christi*. With her commitment to prayer, generosity of alms, and likely vow of chastity, she demonstrated unyielding steadfastness to her faith – a steadfastness that warranted the monks of St Albans and others to judge her worthy of a seat beside Martin and Eugenia at the table of God.

5 Assuming Virginity Tradition and the Naked Narrative in Ælfric's Homily on the Assumption of the Virgin

REBECCA STEPHENSON

In her book and subsequent article, Mary Clayton clearly articulated the central role of Mary as patron saint of the tenth-century Benedictine Reform, through whom the proponents of the reform emphasized the monastic values of celibacy and communal property.¹ Most reformed houses were dedicated to the Virgin alone or in conjunction with another saint.² However, at the same time as the Virgin Mary was an important universal saint, much evidence indicates that even in churches dedicated to her, she was often overshadowed by important local cults. This was the case at Ely, which was dedicated to Mary, Peter, and Æthelthryth, but devotion to the monastic saints Peter and Mary waned as the house became more firmly connected to Æthelthryth, whose relics resided there.³ Clayton suggests that these local saints were much more economically and socially viable than the universal figure of Mary, whose cult seems to have held lengthy significance only at the royal see of Winchester.⁴

The Virgin's failure to be widely culted in the Anglo-Saxon period is in direct contrast to her post-Conquest popularity and may be tied to the lack of any physical relics.⁵ Though most of the widely culted Anglo-Saxon saints have physical relics that tie them to a place and produce miracles, Mary was assumed bodily into heaven and therefore cannot provide any such place-based miracles other than those at her grave site in the valley of Josaphat, which are not particularly productive for English churchmen.⁶ Furthermore, Clayton argues that the strongest period of Marian devotion coincided with the height of the monastic reform and the reign of Edgar.⁷ This strong Marian devotion was supported by royal iconography that connected Mary to the current queen, Ælfthryth, the first anointed West Saxon queen.⁸ The connection between the growing importance of queenship and Mary as heavenly queen can be seen in the *Benedictional of St. Æthelwold*, which contains the earliest western portrait of the coronation of the Virgin, in the miniature for the Assumption.⁹ The strong emphasis on Mary as a universal saint and patron of the reform drops off soon after the death of Edgar, and portraits of Æthelred do not contain the same

combination of Christological and regal imagery so developed in the New Minster Charter or in the *Benedictional of St. Æthelwold*.¹⁰

Ælfric's homilies on the Virgin illustrate the continued veneration of Mary by those with strong ties to Æthelwold's school, especially his First Series homily on the Assumption that presents Mary as queen of heaven through the peculiar addition of an episode from the *Life of Basil*.¹¹ This chapter will examine Ælfric's homily on the Assumption,¹² because it is a site that brings together many conflicting issues surrounding the depiction of the Virgin in the period: her role as queen of heaven, the theological question of her bodily assumption, and concerns about heresy and orthodoxy as defined by Benedictine reformers. I will argue that our understanding of this homily, and thus of Mary's veneration in the late period, is heavily conditioned by Ælfric's construction of his own position as a traditional author and upholder of monastic values. This posturing has been so effective that few have questioned Ælfric's position in the reform or his eccentric choice of sources for this homily.¹³ Ultimately, Ælfric's innovation in the Marian material is his cobbling together of unexpected sources, which both rewrite the narrative of the Assumption and subtly reveal his own idiosyncratic position in the reform. Although the precise reasons for his choice of source may be ultimately unknowable, I hope to provide enough evidence to speculate about why Ælfric may have chosen to follow Paschasius Radbertus's *Cogitis me* and the *Life of Basil*,¹⁴ rather than the more common *Transitus B* version followed by the roughly contemporary *Blickling Homilies*.¹⁵

The Production of Tradition and the Naked Narrative

No one would question the characterization of Ælfric as a "traditional" author. Clare Lees devotes three chapters of her *Tradition and Belief* exclusively to his writings, which figure prominently in her understanding of how late Anglo-Saxon authors refigured the past to speak to their contemporary vision of Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁶ Tradition was also important to many other writings connected to the Benedictine Reform, as the reformers sought to create connections between the present reform and the glory days of English monasticism epitomized by Bede.¹⁷ Ælfric's characteristic method of close translation may make him by far the most traditional author because nearly all of his work relies directly on a source text. Ann Eljenholm Nichols argues that even Ælfric's prefaces, which are often studied and cited as the author's original point of view, although without direct source, are highly formulaic.¹⁸ However, these moments of traditionalism are selective, as Lees reminds us,¹⁹ because it is often

where Ælfric is the most traditional and following his source most closely that he parts ways with his fellow reformers and makes his own innovations to the text.

Such is the case in Ælfric's homily on Mary's Assumption. Although Ælfric follows his source closely, the choice of Paschasius Radbertus's *Cogitis me* as a source is a strange one, because it is a lengthy and digressive work that lacks a narrative description of Mary's life after Christ's ascension and a description of her death and bodily Assumption, as can be found in Marian apocrypha, especially the *Transitus B*, which was a significant source for the Assumption material in the *Blickling Homilies*.²⁰ Ælfric emphatically denounced such apocryphal renderings of Mary's life and death in the opening to this homily, which he claims to have written, "þy læs ðe eow on hand becume. seo lease gesetnyss. þe ðurh gedwolmannum wide tosawen is. 7 ge ðonne þa gehiwedan leasunge for soðre race underfoð." ²¹ This passage has been cited as proof of Ælfric's personal knowledge of apocryphal accounts of Mary's life,²² since he "seems to go beyond the source in his condemnation of the apocrypha: "seo lease gesetnys" and "þa gehiwedan leasung[e]" suggest that he thought the legend completely false, rather than just dubious."²³ Although it is tempting to connect Ælfric's rejection of Marian apocrypha with a rejection of non-monastic homiletic texts similar to those found among the *Blickling Homilies*,²⁴ Ælfric's comments here do not seem to be related to a specifically Benedictine theology. Depictions of the Virgin based on apocryphal sources figure prominently in the *Benedictional of St. Æthelwold*, which was composed at the important Benedictine centre of Winchester.²⁵ If Ælfric knew of the *Transitus B* and rejected it, he was following his own directives, not those of the reformers, who manifest no such hesitations about Marian apocrypha.²⁶

One of the reasons that Ælfric is seen both as traditional and representative of the reform is his seeming obsession with heresy and all those who fall short of Benedictine standards. However, warnings about heresy, such as this one, are often not Ælfric's innovation, but are directly translated from his source text, which reads, "ne forte si venerit vestris in manibus illud apocryphum de transitu eiusdem virginis, dubia pro certis recipiatis."²⁷ Ælfric's statement is decidedly stronger than his source, as Clayton asserted, since he translates "apocryphum de transitu" as "seo lease gesetnyss þe ðurh gedwolmannum wide tosawen is" [the lying text, which is widely made known by heretics], and he translates "dubia" [doubtful] as "gehiwedan leasunge" [fictitious lies]. However, in the Aldhelm glosses, which Mechthild Gretsch has argued were widely studied by Æthelwold and were instrumental in the development of Winchester

vocabulary, which Ælfric used,²⁸ there is a bilingual gloss reading: “apocrifarum .i. falsorum scriptorum, wipersacana” [of apocrypha: i.e., of lying writings of apostates].²⁹ This gloss on *apocryphum* almost perfectly corresponds to Ælfric’s condemnation of Marian apocrypha in the Assumption homily, where “lease gesetnyss” [lying text] is exactly equivalent to the gloss’s “falsorum scriptorum” [false writings], and “ðurh gedwolmannum” [by heretics] can be substituted for “wiðersacana” [apostates].³⁰ Thus, Ælfric’s only addition to this passage is “wide tosa wen is.” This line could possibly be read as a reference to the *Transitus B* or to the *Blickling* Assumption homily, but I suggest that this connection is not as strong as has been assumed.

While I cannot begin to explain fully Ælfric’s choice of this source, I suspect that part of his motivation may have resided in the connection of the *Cogitis me* to Jerome. Paschasius’s text was a deliberate forgery, said to have been written by Jerome and addressed to Paula and Eustochium. The importance of this Church Father’s authorship is clearly seen in the homily, when Ælfric adds to the text a passage highlighting Jerome’s role in biblical translation.³¹ This passage is the longest in the homily without an immediate source,³² and Ælfric innovates here by writing an original text that establishes the credentials and *auctoritas* of this version of the Assumption based on Jerome’s authority as a Church Father and translator of the Hebrew scriptures. When Ælfric differed from other Benedictines by rejecting apocryphal sources circulating in the tenth century, he chose a much earlier source (or so he supposed), one more clearly rooted in early Christianity and the writings of an eminent biblical translator. The authority and traditionalism of the *Cogitis me* were probably confirmed by its presence in a homiliary by Paul the Deacon and the Cotton-Corpus Legendary, both texts – or ones like them – on which Ælfric drew heavily.³³ I suggest that it is the traditionalism of this document more than his actual aversion to the *Transitus B* that encouraged Ælfric’s choice of this source.

Ælfric’s distinct style of abbreviation and translation emphasizes the traditionalism of his writings and the authenticity of his sources. He did not invent his material and seldom wrote so much as a paragraph without a source. He was also an extremely literal translator, who worked in a highly predictable fashion. First, he took his Latin source and created a Latin précis or epitome, in which he deleted all material not immediately relevant to a pared-down version of the plot, thus reducing the source text to about the length of a homily.³⁴ Ælfric’s technique was strange in that in addition to omitting large sections, he also deleted phrases and individual words, creating a kind of “Reader’s Digest Condensed” version. This version was then translated into

English very literally, resulting in a close translation substantially shorter than that which preceded it. Although no epitome for the Mary homily exists, the close verbal correspondences between the homily and his source text indicate that he did use one.³⁵ What Ælfric chose to omit and keep was usually fairly predictable as well, since he ordinarily followed the narrative events of the text without extraneous commentary. This idiosyncratic method of translation may have been the naked narrative that Ælfric discussed in the preface to his translation of Genesis:

We secgað eac foran to þæt seo boc is swiþe deop gastlice to understandenne, and we ne writað na mare buton þa nacedan gerecednisse. Þonne þincþ þam ungelæredum þæt eall þæt andgit beo belocen on þære anfealdan gerecednisse, ac hit ys swiþe feor þam.³⁶

In this statement, Ælfric claims that an unambiguous narrative, focusing on “just the facts,” strips away a dangerous spiritual truth. This metaphor about translation joins the naked body with a clear and unambiguous narrative, but these are precisely the two things that Ælfric does not give us in the Assumption homily: a clear univalent narrative or a body, naked or otherwise.

In order to illustrate more fully how Ælfric’s process of abbreviation and translation works, let me present his passage and the corresponding passage from the parallel Latin text. This section presents the theological crux of the homily, that is, the question of whether Mary was assumed into heaven bodily:

Nis geræd on nanre bec nan swutelre gewissung be hire geendunge buton þæt heo nu todæg wuldorfullice of þam lichaman gewat; Hyre byrigen is swutol eallum onlociendum oð þysne andweardan dæg onmiddan þære dene iosaphat: seo dene is betwux þære dune sion. 7 þam munte olifeti. 7 seo byrigen is æteowod open 7 æmtig. 7 þæronuppon on hire wurðmynte is aræred mære cyrce mid wunderlicum stangeweorce; Nis nanum deadlicum men cuð. hū oððe on hwilcere tide hyre halga lichama þanon ætbroden wære: oððe hwider he ahafen sy: oððe hwæðer heo of deaðe arise; Cwædon þeah gehwylce lareowas þæt hyre sunu. se þe on þam ðriddan dæge mihtlice of deaðe aras. þæt he eac his moder lichaman of deaðe arærde. & mid undeadlicum wuldre on heofenan rice gelogode; Eac swa gelice forwel menige lareowas on heora bocum setton be þam geedcucedum mannum þe mid criste of deaðe arison þæt hi ecelice arærede sind.³⁷

This is a very close translation of the Latin, which reads:

Nihil aliud experiri potest pro certo, nisi quod hodierna die gloriosa

migravit a corpore. Monstratur sepulcrum eius cernentibus nobis usque ad praesens in vallis Iosaphat medio, quae vallis est inter montem Sion et montem Oliveti posita ... ubi in eius honore fabricata est ecclesia miro lapideo tabulatu ... sed nunc vacuum esse cernentibus ostenditur ... Quomodo vel quo tempore ... sanctissimum corpus eius inde ablatum fuerit vel ubi transpositum, utrum vere surrexerit, nescitur, quamvis nonnulli astruere velint eam iam resuscitatam et beata cum Christo immortalitate in caelestibus vestiri ... Sicuti et de his, quos cum Domino ... resurrexisse credimus ... de quibus profecto nonnulli doctorum senserunt, etiam et in suis relinquerent scriptis, quod iam in illis perpetua sit completa resurrectio.³⁸

As this passage shows, Ælfric's translation can be described as extremely literal, since even much of the word order is preserved after comments deemed superfluous to the basic narrative have been removed. However, in this close translation Ælfric has made subtle changes that still present a distinctly different message. Malcolm Godden asserts, "Ælfric strengthens the case for the assumption, writing *gehwylice lareowas* (either 'all' or 'many' scholars), for Paschasius's *nonnulli*, and drawing the parallel with Christ's own resurrection."³⁹

The suggestion that *many* teachers have written of Mary's Assumption slightly contradicts what Ælfric says earlier in the passage, when he claims that no clear account of her Assumption can be found: "Nis geræd on nanre bec nan swutelre gewissung be hire geendunge buton þæt heo nu todæg wuldorfullice of þam lichaman gewat." This emphatic statement indulges the Old English grammatical possibility for multiple negation in *nis*, *nanre*, and *nan*, a construction not possible in Latin. While the Old English insists that no account of the Assumption exists, the Latin account is rather understated, "Nihil aliud experiri potest pro certo, nisi quod hodierna die gloriosa migravit a corpore" [Nothing is able to be proven for certain, except that on this glorious day she departed from her body]. Paschasius, on the other hand, asserts that nothing is able to be known for sure, and his position on Mary's Assumption is agnosticism. Ælfric does not seem to have an objection to bodily assumptions per se, because elsewhere he recounts the corporeal Assumption of John the Evangelist,⁴⁰ and he deletes a comment from Paschasius indicating that John's Assumption might be doubtful.⁴¹ Ælfric has followed the words of the passage very closely, but in context the paragraph makes a slightly different claim: although there is no book that clearly describes the Assumption, many authors say it happened. This subtle change suggests that it is not the Assumption that Ælfric disputes, but the texts describing it.

If we accept, as Godden and Clayton argue, that Ælfric had

knowledge of the *Transitus B* or the *Blickling Homilies*, it is interesting that he asserts that there is not a clear understanding (“swutelre gewissung”) of Mary’s death, since there were accounts circulating. The word *swutelre* [clear] has no exact equivalent in the Latin, unless it was suggested by *pro certo* [for certain]. In this case Ælfric has significantly changed the wording of the whole piece, possibly because of the Latin idiom. However, this is an interesting change if he did have knowledge of the *Blickling* Assumption homily, because Clayton describes that homily as “bewildering, mainly because of the translator’s poor Latinity: sentences are confused, biblical allusions unrecognized and consequently mangled, the basic narrative is obscured.”⁴² Perhaps Ælfric is right, and a *clear* narrative was exactly what Anglo-Saxon England was lacking. The word *swutol* is repeated in the next line to describe Mary’s grave, which is “*swutol eallum onlociendum oð þysne andweardan dæg.*” Although in the previous example the word *swutol* was suggested by the Latin *pro certo* [for certain], in the second sentence it is a close translation of “monstratur” [it is shown, or it is made clear]. By using the same English word for two very different Latin words, Ælfric has created a verbal echo not previously present, but he cannot be accused of altering his source, since in each case he is merely adapting Latin idioms. While Ælfric emphasizes the traditional nature of the text through his rigorous translation method, he more directly contrasts any narrative of the Assumption, which has been denied to us, with Mary’s grave, which is open and empty, as a clear sign to all onlookers.

A close reading of the passage and the adaptations that Ælfric made to his source indicate that he did not necessarily have problems with the corporeal Assumption as a point of theology; it is the narrative and the physical details of the Assumption he rejects, not the theological possibility of it. This conflict shows the tension between tradition and innovation in the text, because Ælfric’s position is not necessarily at odds with the Benedictine establishment, nor can his choice of text be criticized. His innovation seems to be his refusal to represent a narrative that includes the physical body of Mary.

This homily is not the only one in which Ælfric makes a choice not to narrate details that concern the physical body of Mary. In Ælfric’s First Series homily on the Annunciation, he offers an exegetical explanation of the Ave Maria, rather than any kind of narrative rendering.⁴³ Mary’s body functions in the same way in the homily on the Nativity of Christ, where Ælfric offers an almost exegetical explanation of Christ’s birth as a part of salvation history, relating every portion of the story to contemporary Church teachings on the relationship of Christ to Anglo-Saxon society.⁴⁴ In the Nativity homily,

Mary, Joseph, and Christ signify not as historical people, but rather as symbols that point to a correct teaching with immediate relevance to Ælfric's tenth-century audience. As such, Ælfric presents Mary not as an embodied person, but rather as a textual symbol to be interpreted. This passage from the homilies illustrates the effacing of the physical acts and bodies associated with the nativity in favour of a more figural interpretation: “Maria acende hire frumcennedan sunu on þisum andweardan dæge ... Næs þæt cild for ði gecweden hire frumcennede cild. Swilce heo oðer syðþan acende. ac for ði þe crist is frumcenned of manegum gastlicum gebroðrum. Ealle cristene men sind his gastlican gebroðra: ⁊ he is se frumcenneda on gife ⁊ on godcundnesse ancenned of þam ælmihtigan fæder.”⁴⁵ By a quick sleight of hand, in which he clarifies the meaning of “frumcennedan,” Ælfric removes the emphasis from Mary's physical motherhood. Christ is not the firstborn of Mary's children in a fleshly sense, since according to Ælfric, Mary has no other children. In a spiritual sense, however, Christ has many brothers – all those who follow his teachings. The connections to Christ's spiritual family come from his father, God, not from his mother, Mary, thus shifting the emphasis from physical motherhood that can be read on the body to a textual genealogy. Notably, when the shepherds arrive in Ælfric's version of events, they read the miracle of the virgin birth on the child, the Word made flesh, not the unblemished body of Mary.⁴⁶

The close analysis of the passage from Ælfric's homily on Mary's Assumption has shown how he constructs himself as a traditional author throughout his writing. He condemns heresy, he follows the venerable teachings of Jerome, and his translation style is so close, it could be called literal. However, all of these seemingly conservative and traditional impulses belie Ælfric's innovations throughout the text. In subtle ways, in both his choice of source and his small adaptations while translating, he recreates Marian material on the Assumption. However, his reasons for choosing a new source do not necessarily have anything to do with Ælfric's personal concerns about a corporeal assumption, but have more to do with his desire to efface Mary's physical body in order to concentrate on her role as queen of heaven.⁴⁷ This particular facet of Mary's iconography is developed further in the final part of the homily, that excerpted from the *Life* of St Basil.

The Life of Basil and the Queen of Heaven

For this final part of the homily, Ælfric changes sources from Paschasius Radbertus's *Cogitis me* to the anonymous *Life of St. Basil*.⁴⁸ The inclusion of this particular incident is somewhat unusual in the Ælfrician corpus because it relates the story of Mercurius, who kills

Julian the apostate under the direction of Mary and at the request of Bishop Basil. Most intriguing about this episode is that fact that that Mercurius is depicted not as a living saint acting on orders received in a vision of the Virgin, but as a dead saint, whose spirit takes up physical weapons to kill a terrestrial leader. This seems a strange selection, given Ælfric's tendency to restrict the scope and impact of miracles.⁴⁹ And while there is a trend in the later Middle Ages to include incidents such as these among the miracles of the Virgin, this particular change in sources seems to be Ælfric's own innovation, which anticipates a later medieval tradition.⁵⁰ The inclusion of this episode, however, may be the key to Ælfric's treatment of Mary throughout the homily, because Mary, as intercessor and queen of heaven, fulfils roles similar to that seen in many reformed texts of the period.

The shift of source focuses the emphasis more squarely on the figure of Basil, Mary's body being conspicuously absent from most of the events. In the entire episode, she appears once in a vision to Basil, "þa on þære ðriddan nihte ðæs fæstenes geseah se biscop micel heofonlic werod on ælcere healfe þæs temples 7 on middan ðam werode sæt seo heofonlice cwen maria 7 cwæð to hyre ætstandenum; Gelangiað me þone martyr mercurium þæt he gewende wið ðæs arleasan wipersacan iulianes 7 hine acwelle. se ðe mid toþundenum mode god minne sunu forsihð."⁵¹ In this vision, heaven is depicted as a kind of royal kingdom with a strong military operation, where the spirits of saints still can fight for their leader. Accordingly Mercurius, a soldier saint who was buried with his weapons, appears at the behest of Mary and kills Julian as he is ordered. Mary thus is styled as queen of heaven and leader of an army, who responds to the requests of her faithful bishop. The remainder of the miracle, however, centres on Bishop Basil and Mercurius, not on Mary's own person while she rules in heaven.

The emphasis on Mary as queen of heaven has a strong connection to the imperial iconography of Christ and the related Christological iconography associated with King Edgar in reformed texts.⁵² The miniature in the *Benedictional of St. Æthelwold* for the Assumption of Mary includes a hand offering the Virgin a crown on her deathbed. Robert Deshman connects the impetus behind the portrait of the coronation of the Virgin, the earliest in the west, to Edgar's emphasis on his own quasi-imperial role as overking of Britain, reflected in imperial depictions of Christ, the crowned Magi, and Christological pictures of Edgar.⁵³ He suggests, similarly, that regal depictions of Mary are related to Edgar's Queen Ælfthryth, the first West Saxon queen to be consecrated. According to the *Regularis Concordia*, Ælfthryth was declared the protector of Benedictine women's houses, just as her husband protected the men. In addition, Ælfthryth had an important

role as an intercessor for both Bishop Æthelwold and other Benedictine interests.⁵⁴ The depiction of Mary in the Assumption homily as successful in an intercessory role fits well with Benedictine theology about the proper role of monasticized rulers, especially queens.

Mary's prominence in the dedication of the churches, such as the one visited by Basil, may also be related to the universalizing role that the Virgin played in the Benedictine Reform. Basil prays and fasts in the church dedicated to Mary; it is here that Basil sees the vision of Mary leading the heavenly troop and ordering Mercurius to kill Julian. Basil then confirms the vision by visiting a nearby church with the relics of Mercurius. He then returns to Mary's church and donates the treasures given by the citizens to a minster. In the light of Clayton's suggestion that the decline in Marian devotion in the late tenth century might have been related to a preference for local saints,⁵⁵ it is interesting that Mary's central role is emphasized over that of a saint whose relics were connected to the place. This miracle is structured so that the local saint accomplishes the miracle, but only through the power and command of Mary. Ælfric also emphasizes the physical church dedicated to Mary in a manner not present in the source. The offerings are brought into the Marian church, the vision is seen there, and all Basil's speeches take place inside it. According to Godden, "Basil's instruction that the people should offer their *lac* or gifts in the temple does not appear in the source."⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Latin text speaks of the physical building as being not the locus of Basil's activity, but the mountain on which Mary's temple sits. Ælfric writes that, after visiting the relics of Mercurius, Basil "*þærrihte wende to sancta marian temple,*"⁵⁷ but the source reads simply, "*recurrat ad montem.*"⁵⁸ The relocating of Basil's speeches to the interior of Mary's church highlights her role as intercessor, but also emphasizes the centrality of intercessory prayer by Benedictines, since nearly all reformed centres were dedicated to Mary either exclusively or in conjunction with another saint. Notably in Ælfric's version, the offerings are given to endow "*þæt minster,*" although in the Latin text the gifts were used to adorn the altar with gold and gemstones.⁵⁹

While Ælfric's depiction of Mary as heavenly queen and universal patron saint of the reform accords well with Benedictine preoccupations of the 970s, it was no longer historically relevant in the period in which Ælfric composed this particular homily. The Marian imagery in reform-era artwork is strongly connected to the Christological imagery associated with Edgar, who died in 975, approximately fifteen years before the compilation of the First Series.⁶⁰ The current king, Æthelred, did not adopt the Christological imagery of his father, nor did he adapt Marian imagery for his wives. Furthermore,

Ælfric did not have the same relationship to Æthelred that his teacher Æthelwold enjoyed with Edgar.⁶¹ This changed relationship to the king is reflected in Ælfric's abbreviation of the *Regularis Concordia*, the so-called *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, in which he excised many references to the importance and authority of kings. Specifically, according to Christopher A. Jones, "it is the near-total avoidance of matter from the proem to the *Concordia* that most undercuts Æthelwold's celebration of the king as patron and protector of monks."⁶² Although the creation of the *Letter* in c. 1005 significantly postdates the dissemination of the Catholic Homilies,⁶³ Jones suggests that the changing political ideology could already have been felt in Ælfric's early days in Winchester, where "until his transfer to Cernel (c. 987) he was well placed to observe the monastic theology of kingship undergo gradual changes that quietly distanced the monks' fortunes from those of a ruler less popular and, in some cases, less dependable than Edgar had been."⁶⁴ This homily responds to the contemporary political situation by ascribing to Mary the imperial trappings associated with Edgar's reign, thus evoking nostalgia for a period that Ælfric may have perceived as a high point in the relationship between the church and the crown.⁶⁵

A subtle commentary on kingship, and possibly nostalgia for the same recently passed golden age, can also be seen in the figure of Julian the apostate, who is juxtaposed to Basil, the bishop of Caesarea.⁶⁶ Ælfric emphasizes that Basil "leornode on anre scole. ⁊ se ylca iulianus samod; ða gelamp hit swa þæt basilius wearð to biscope gecoren. to anre byrig þe is gehaten cappadocia: ⁊ iulianus to casere: þeah ðe he æror to preoste bescoren wære."⁶⁷ Although this section conforms to Ælfric's typical abbreviated style of translation, Ælfric is being very selective at this point in the story by taking a sentence or a phrase from each of three different chapters. Godden's commentary lists the source this way: "[I.5] Condiscipulos habuit Gregorium Magnum ... itemque Iulianum ... [I.7] venit in Cappadocum regionem ... [1.8] Basilium elegerunt episcopum."⁶⁸ Although these can still be called direct translations of the source, they are cobbled together painstakingly from chapters from which most of the text was omitted. However, Godden notes: "The details of Julian's history, as cleric and then emperor and persecutor, are not given in the *Vita*. Ælfric could have learnt them from Haymo's *Historiae Sacrae Epitome*, where Julian is said to have been a *clericus* at first and afterwards a pagan and persecutor of Christian."⁶⁹ Although the text calls Julian *impius*, nowhere in the source is his tonsure or his apostasy emphasized as pointedly as they are by Ælfric. The apostasy of both a priest and a ruler presents a significant rupture in the social order for a Benedictine

like Ælfric.⁷⁰

The emphasis on Julian's tonsure and his later apostasy orients the story amid a number of concerns connected to the behaviour of kings as defined by Benedictine reformers. The regal iconography from the late tenth century, especially in depictions of King Edgar, connected the king to a good abbot who was responsible for ruling jointly with bishops, not opposing them as Julian does. The frontispiece to the *Regularis Concordia* shows King Edgar *synthroni* between Dunstan and Æthelwold, emphasizing the connection between temporal and spiritual rulers.⁷¹ Deshman suggests that this idea pervades other portraits related to the reform, such as the New Minster Charter, which "conceived of the abbot and the king as brothers-in-arms, both soldiers of Christ defending the Lord's spiritual and worldly kingdoms."⁷² The Assumption homily displays a disjointed relationship between the secular and religious powers, since Julian is depicted in this incident as a soldier who, instead of using his military prowess for the good of his people, vows to turn those troops against his own citizens because of a disagreement with the religious authority, Basil. In the narrative, order is restored only through the intervention of Mary, who leads a heavenly troop (*werod*) and calls for his death at the hands of the warrior saint Mercurius, whose status as a soldier can be seen in the fact that he was buried with his weapons. Julian does not fulfil monastic expectations, because he has left his monasticized role as priestly ruler, abbot, and soldier of Christ, and for that reason he must be killed by a heavenly army led by Mary but ultimately directed by Bishop Basil.

The Basil episode articulates an elaborate arrangement whereby a monastic bishop works as an intercessor between the people and the heavenly authority, ultimately overthrowing a temporal ruler for the good of the people. Since there is no just king in this episode and no mention is made of Julian's replacement, the reverence due a terrestrial leader is displaced back into the heavenly realm: Mary is the queen to whom devotion is owed. The theology of the monastic reform encouraged such veneration of Mary, but in texts such as the *Benedictional of St. Æthelwold* the royal iconography for Christ and Mary is directly related to an analogous project to endow Edgar with Christological symbolism. Thus, in these early reformed images and texts the special emphasis placed on the coronation of Mary is connected to Ælfthryth's prominence as the first consecrated West Saxon queen. Ælfric, however, has taken the veneration of the ruler reflected in the Marian and Christological programs of the reform and repositioned it solely on Mary without refracting any light on the Anglo-Saxons' temporal rulers. Thus, the sole focus on Mary's role as heavenly queen draws attention away from any terrestrial rulership.

Conclusion

Ælfric's choice of sources in this homily has less to do with concerns about a corporeal assumption and more to do with a desire to restrict Mary's role to that of heavenly queen. Ælfric constructed this regal depiction of Mary, just as he constructed the abbreviations of his sources, by joining together elements from a variety of authoritative texts and distilling them to their essential components. By using motifs common to artwork from the Winchester school and emphasizing the queenship of Mary as she was culted at Winchester, Ælfric presents himself as a highly traditional author and upholder of the Benedictine establishment; yet his ultimate political theology does not accord with the merging of terrestrial and celestial rulership seen so prominently in the *Benedictional of St. Æthelwold*. Instead, in this homily, Ælfric transfers the devotion owed to a quasi-Christological king onto the figure of Mary, who is accessible through monastic intercession. In this subtle sleight of hand, Ælfric creates a harmonious society focused on the Church and the laity, but he discreetly excludes the importance of an earthly king.

6 Genre Trouble: Reading the Old English *Vita* of Saint Euphrosyne¹

ROBIN NORRIS

The *Life of Saint Euphrosyne*,² a woman who lived in the Christian community of Alexandria in the fifth century, was translated from Greek into Latin in the eighth century,³ and the only complete extant Old English version is one of the four anonymous interpolations in the principal surviving manuscript of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*.⁴ Although the transvestite saint motif was not uncommon in early Christian Europe and throughout the Middle Ages,⁵ only two examples are known from Anglo-Saxon England: the anonymous *Life of Saint Euphrosyne* and Ælfric's *Passion of Saint Eugenia*.⁶ The shared manuscript context of these texts, not to mention our postmodern fixation on the transgression of gender boundaries, has led critics to subject Euphrosyne and Eugenia to an arranged marriage of sorts, the two saints being discussed almost exclusively in conjunction with one another.⁷ Yet this arrangement violates the genre boundary that distinguishes their two separate modes of sanctity. Euphrosyne's life features all the hallmarks of a *uita*, including divine foreknowledge of her exact time of death and the mournful response of her male devotee; in contrast, Peter Brown calls martyrs like Eugenia "the very special dead for whom mourning was unthinkable."⁸ This chapter therefore examines the role of Euphrosyne's grieving father in establishing her sanctity, for Paphnuntius's three laments for Euphrosyne emphasize this text's status as a *uita*, rather than a passion, and underscore Euphrosyne's status as a confessor, rather than a martyr.⁹ I will also argue that Euphrosyne dies a woman, and considering the scarcity of female confessors in the extant Old English corpus, the most remarkable feature of her life may then be not her cross-dressing but her death by natural causes.

Although both are transvestite saint legends, one crucial difference between the lives of Euphrosyne and Eugenia is that these two texts represent two distinct subgenres of hagiography. According to Michael Lapidge, "There are two broad categories of saint's life: the *passio* ('passion') and the *vita* ('life')."¹⁰ The subject of a passion is usually labelled a martyr, while *confessor* is the generic shorthand for a *uita*'s subject. The vast majority of female saints in the Old English corpus

are, like Eugenia, the subjects of passions. The *Life of Euphrosyne*, on the other hand, fulfils the criteria Lapidge outlines for a proper *uita*: “the saint is born of noble stock; his birth is accompanied by miraculous portents; as a youth he excels at learning and reveals that he is destined for saintly activity; he turns from secular to holy life (often forsaking his family) and so proceeds through the various ecclesiastical grades; he reveals his sanctity while still on earth by performing various miracles; eventually he sees his death approaching and, after instructing his disciples or followers, dies calmly; after his death many miracles appear at his tomb.”¹¹ Euphrosyne’s nobility, education, forsaking of her father, the manner of her death, and her posthumous miracles all follow the pattern typical of a *uita*. Lapidge also notes, “any number of variants is possible within these basic frameworks; but the framework itself is invariable.”¹² An awareness of *uita* conventions brings other details of the legend into focus as well: Euphrosyne’s birth is miraculous not because of portents but because of her parents’ difficulty in conceiving; instead of advancement through the ecclesiastical grades, she distinguishes herself through austerity in isolation; and her sanctity is publicly revealed not while on earth but after death, so that her entire career will then retrospectively be read as the miraculous deeds of a holy woman.

The deathbed scene Lapidge mentions here is dependent on the standard *uita* miracle: foreknowledge of the saint’s own impending time of death. In order to make this divine prescience known, the saint must inform his or her followers, who are required by the generic conventions to mourn this holy departure. Examples in the lives of male confessors are numerous and include Cuthbert, Guthlac, and Martin, to name but a few.¹³ In this regard, Euphrosyne seems to have more in common with the confessors who share her genre than with most saints who share her gender, as Andrew P. Scheil explains: “The prosaic, almost tranquil end to Euphrosyne’s life stands in contrast to the deaths of other virgin saints ... Euphrosyne’s end is not as public, not as dramatic, and not the typical spectacular death of a virgin martyr.”¹⁴ In fact, because it is the death of a woman, its prosaic nature is actually quite unique. Meanwhile, the exaggerated mourning of Euphrosyne’s male follower further differentiates her experience from that of the martyrs and highlights the *uita*’s status *qua uita*. Similarly, the death of Mary of Egypt follows the conventions proper to a *uita*, and her one follower is a melodramatic, mourning man.¹⁵ Unlike Mary of Egypt, however, Euphrosyne lives her entire adult life in a monastic setting, where she fulfils the confessor function in both life and death. In fact, she may be the only female saint in the entire Old English corpus to do so.

The significance of Euphrosyne's status as a female confessor, rather than a martyr, has escaped the notice of scholars whose focus on queer sexuality and the transgression of gender roles has led them to read her *uita* exclusively in conjunction with the martyrdom of Eugenia, a strategy that can also result in Euphrosyne's defeminization.¹⁶ Critics who follow Paul E. Szarmach's "specific focus ... on sexuality, both explicit and implicit, and Euphrosyne's holy transvestism"¹⁷ have most closely scrutinized the scene in which the monks are tempted by Smaragdus's beauty:¹⁸ "ƿa forþam se sylfe smaragdus wæs wlitig on an-syne . swa oft swa ða broðra comon to cyrcan . þonne besende se awyrgeða gast mænig-fealde geþohtas on heora mod . and wurdon þearle gecostnode þurh his fægernysse."¹⁹ Szarmach asks, "Are these temptations homosexual – one wonders, the temptation is *þurh HIS fægernysse* – or heterosexual? Or is the Old English author simply toying – metaphysically, so to speak – with the sexual theme?"²⁰ Allen J. Frantzen believes that this temptation is homosexual, despite his assertion that the text also "curb[s] the risk, since the source of the temptation to the homosexually vulnerable men (all of them, apparently) is a beautiful woman."²¹ Yet in his reading of the Old French *La Vie de Sainte Euphrosine*, Simon Gaunt disagrees with Frantzen, asserting that "the 'risk' of homosexuality is not curbed ... but rather enhanced,"²² for Euphrosyne's fair face is not that of a garden-variety temptress, but the source of temptation to homosexual sin.

It is worth noting that the source of this temptation remains ungendered in the Latin text. The monks complain to the abbot about the new eunuch: "quia habebat vultum decorum Smaragdus, dum veniebat in ecclesiam ad deprecandum Deum, multos diabolus incitabat adversus decorem vultus illius per malas cogitationes."²³ However, a beautiful face is the only physical manifestation of the abstraction "talem pulchritudinem,"²⁴ which the abbot has brought into the monastery. Even in the words of the Old English translator, where the abbot has instead introduced "swa wlitigne man,"²⁵ the masculine form of the adjective's accusative inflection is due only to the fact that *mann* "person" is a grammatically masculine noun. Nonetheless, it is the translator's previous use of the masculine pronoun *his* that has led critics to masculinize Euphrosyne in their readings of her *uita*. For example, Scheil assumes that Euphrosyne has "exchang[ed] her female identity for a monastic habit."²⁶ Szarmach writes that "Euphrosyne 'unwomans' herself."²⁷ Frantzen calls Euphrosyne, Eugenia, and Agnes "examples of the desexed holy woman."²⁸

An important exception to this trend is the work of Clare Lees and Gillian Overing, who insist on the female identity of these "desexed" women. Regarding the women in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, Lees and

Overing argue that, while they do become icons of chastity, “these saints remain resolutely female, however much they invite cross-gendered identification. Chastity remains tied to femininity, and the female body provides the vehicle for transcendence and transformation.”²⁹ Moreover, Lees and Overing read Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints* as a “product of the Benedictine Reform’s purchase on secular life outside the monastery.”³⁰ “The ideology at work here is worth pausing on,” they continue; “‘real’ religious women disappear from the cultural record at precisely the moment when the female saint triumphs in her chastity.”³¹ The Benedictine Reform’s limits on Anglo-Saxon female religious may then explain why Ælfric was interested in translating the passion of a martyr like Eugenia. Under the more normative scenario represented by her passion, after the saint’s “refeminization,” Frantzen observes that her powers are “contained within a woman’s world” until Eugenia dies a martyr.³² Euphrosyne, on the other hand, calculates when to reveal her female identity so precisely that she is able to engineer the conclusion of her own life while avoiding the recontainment experienced by Eugenia. The very paucity of female confessor-figures within the extant corpus of Old English hagiography is perhaps an indication of the anxiety such women elicited. Ælfric includes only one in *Lives of Saints*, the abbess Æthelthryth, a prominent Anglo-Saxon saint he could hardly avoid, whose *uita* appears between the lives of Saints Alban and Swithun in a coincidentally English subsection of the anthology.³³ Yet Ælfric, who relies heavily on Bede’s account, represents the powerful abbess of Ely not as a confessor but through an implicit comparison to those martyrs who serve as models for spouses who wish to remain chaste – couples such as Julian and Basilissa, Chrysanthus and Daria, and Cecilia and Valerian.³⁴ The fact that Ælfric instructs his readers to interpret his one *uita* of a female saint as if she too is a martyr is further evidence of a desire to keep the controversial figure of the female confessor in the closet.

These anxieties were apparently not shared by the anonymous hagiographer who depicted Euphrosyne as a woman with a successful monastic career, a role that grows out of her experience as a daughter. When Szarmach declares that Euphrosyne’s “life is, at its root, a story about father(s) and daughter,”³⁵ he opens the door to an approach that reveals the true nature of Euphrosyne’s sanctity, for it is Euphrosyne’s father, Paphnuntius, who serves as the confessor’s requisite devotee. It is through her relationship with her father that Euphrosyne performs the standard miracles of the genre: she consoles her follower in his despair, reveals divine foreknowledge of her exact time of death, and leaves instructions for her burial. According to Scheil, “The narrative

focus on the experiences and emotions of Paphnuntius rivals the focus on Euphrosyne,”³⁶ but this is because his mourning is crucial to her development as a confessor. In fact, the Latin source is even more extreme than the Old English redaction; Hugh Magennis observes, “The approach which [the translator] follows here is one of studied unsensationalism, playing down the human feelings and sentiments of the characters as seen in the original, and sacrificing some of the dramatic heightening to which the story might lend itself.”³⁷ Even so, this tendency is surprising primarily because the Old English text itself is so sad, requiring Euphrosyne repeatedly to console her grieving father, Paphnuntius, as he utters three highly rhetorical laments over the course of the *uita*.³⁸

Euphrosyne’s identity as daughter is so central to her *uita* that the text opens by introducing her father, Paphnuntius, and it closes with his death, ten years to the day after that of his daughter. The label that the author most frequently attaches to the saint is not “virgin” (Ælfric’s constant epithet for both Eugenia and Æthelthryth) but “daughter,” referring to Euphrosyne as such as least twenty-one times in 334 lines.³⁹ Paphnuntius’s role is further emphasized because the presence of his wife, Euphrosyne’s mother, is downplayed, even before her untimely death. When the Latin text introduces Paphnuntius’s wife, “ejus doloribus afficiebatur maxime, videns virum suum fluctuantem nimium,”⁴⁰ but the translator omits any mention of this woman’s emotional state from the Old English account. Likewise, the “fructum ventris”⁴¹ for which the abbot prays becomes “bearnas wæstm,”⁴² as if Euphrosyne is not actually born from her mother’s body. Instead, when presenting her to the monastery, Paphnuntius acknowledges the abbot’s role as co-progenitor by introducing “þone wæstm þinra gebeda mine dohtor.”⁴³ Euphrosyne, on the other hand, has not forgotten that her father “habuit uxorem quæ me genuit, quæ jam transivit de hac vita.”⁴⁴ The Old English mentions only that “his mæcca min modor is of þyssum life gewiten,”⁴⁵ and here, the translator emphasizes Euphrosyne’s mother’s absence through death, but not her role in childbearing. This shift creates a virgin birth in reverse, in effect giving Euphrosyne one human parent and one divine, but it also undermines Paphnuntius’s claim on his daughter, who belongs to the monastery from the start.

From the reader’s first encounter with Paphnuntius, he is described as emotionally unstable. Initially, he is “þearle gedrefed”⁴⁶ because he has no heir “þæt æfter his forðsiðe to his æhtum fenge.”⁴⁷ When we see Paphnuntius for the second time, he is “swiðe unrot”⁴⁸ to find Euphrosyne missing. Her intended bridegroom, himself “swiðe gedrefed,”⁴⁹ finds Paphnuntius lying on the ground, and when the

community realizes she is gone, “hi weopon hi swylce hio dead wære . se sweor be-mænde his snore . and se brydguma his bryd.”⁵⁰ This is the occasion of Paphnuntius’s first lament:

Wa me mine sweteste bearn . wa me mira eagenas leoht . and mines lifes
frofor . hwa be-reafode me minra speda . oððe to-stencte mine æhta .
hwa forcearf minne win-geard . oððe hwa adwæscte min leoht-fæt . Hwa
bescirede me mines hihtes . oþþe hwa gewemde þone wite mīre dohtor .
Hwīlc wulf gelæhte min lamb . oþþe hwīlc stow on sæ oððe on lande
hæfð behyd swa cynelice ansyne . heo wæs geomrigendra frofor . and
geswencendra rest . Eala þu eorþe ne swelh þu næfre min blod . ær ic
geseo hwæt sy gedon be eufrosinan mīre dehter.⁵¹

The doubled patterning of this speech through its use of repetition and renaming reflects the double nature of Euphrosyne’s new identity, which remains hidden from Paphnuntius. Nor does it occur to Paphnuntius that Euphrosyne may have acted of her own free will; he invents all kinds of scenarios in which she (and therefore he too) becomes a passive victim. Meanwhile, the reader, having been enlightened by the omniscient narrator, is able to answer many of Paphnuntius’s questions by interpreting them as riddles. For example, the only wolves who are threatening to profane her beauty are the monks Paphnuntius paid to pray for her conception, and the place on earth that hides his daughter’s noble but tempting countenance is the monastery where he sent her for premarital counselling. Magennis feels that these long speeches interrupt the brisk flow of the narrative. Of this lament, in particular, he says, “It is a powerful speech, but one which serves to deflect attention away from the central figure by focusing on the feelings of Paphnuntius ... The effect of Paphnuntius’s speech, as indeed of other features in the [Old English] version, is to increase interest in Paphnuntius at the expense of Euphrosyne.”⁵² Yet it is fundamental to the saint’s *uita* that she has Paphnuntius to console, and so she is described as “my life’s consolation” and “the consolation of the mourning” even before she has helped Paphnuntius to cope with this particular loss.

Ultimately, it is Euphrosyne herself who will ensure that Paphnuntius fulfils this vow to learn what happened to his daughter, and uttering this lament cannot ease Paphnuntius’s mind because his next step is necessary to incite the saint’s first miracle. When Paphnuntius has spoken these words, “hi ongunnon ealle weopan . and mycel heof wæs geond ealle þa ceastre . þa ne mihte pafnuntius nan forebyrd habban . ne nane frofre onfon.”⁵³ Paphnuntius then goes to the monastery and falls at the feet of the abbot, who, through the contagion of sorrow, also grows “swyðe unbliðe.”⁵⁴ All the monks are

asked to pray “þæt ic mote findan þæt geswinc þines gebedes.”⁵⁵ If this comment refers to the monks’ previous role as Euphrosyne’s progenitors, then it is a testament to the power of their prayers; if it is a request that they make Paphnuntius’s daughter manifest again, as they did before, then they will fail. Such negative results are unusual for the monks,⁵⁶ but it is the power of Saint Euphrosyne that has blocked their success with her own prayer: “Witodlice þære eadigan femnan eufrosinan ben wæs to gode dæges and nihtes . þæt heo næfre on hire life gecyðed wære.”⁵⁷ Unbeknownst to the monks, this prayer will be granted so specifically that never in her lifetime, only on her deathbed, will the saint reveal herself.

The abbot next attempts to console Paphnuntius with the thought that if God has not revealed some evil that has befallen her, then clearly Euphrosyne has instead chosen some good “ræd.”⁵⁸ To what extent were the monks responsible for giving this advice? Strictly speaking, Euphrosyne’s decision to enter a male rather than a female monastery was hers alone, predicated on the fear that her father would forcibly remove her from a nunnery “for mines bryd-guman þingan.”⁵⁹ Indeed, her father’s search party does look “on fæmnena mynstre,” and, had she gone there, her discovery could have turned the narrative into yet another story of a virgin martyr.⁶⁰ However, it is a monk who encourages Euphrosyne to become a bride of Christ; she does so by making the monastery, rather than her bridegroom, Paphnuntius’s inheritor.⁶¹ A second monk assures her that “þines fæder æhta findað yrfeweardes genoge.”⁶² This is true because Euphrosyne promises the abbot, “gif ic her þurh-wunige . se ofer-eaca hider cymð.”⁶³ This prediction is merely logical (for being found out and forced to marry is what would remove her from the monastery, restoring Paphnuntius’s inheritance to the bridegroom instead), but its execution is miraculous, for Euphrosyne’s plan succeeds, abetted unwittingly by the same monks who attempted to foil it.⁶⁴

Although the abbot boldly states, “ic getrywe on god þæt he gyt on þissum life hi geswutelie,” within a matter of days Paphnuntius is back again, even more pathetic than before.⁶⁵ He entreats the abbot: “Gebide for me . for-þam min sar be mire dehter ma and ma wyxst on me mid anxum-nysse.”⁶⁶ This request becomes the basis for Euphrosyne’s second miracle, for Paphnuntius is given the opportunity to speak to his daughter without recognizing her, thus fulfilling the saint’s desire to comfort her father without being recognized. Furthermore, the Latin text more emphatically represents Paphnuntius’s sorrow, to substantiate more effectively the miraculous nature of Euphrosyne’s ability to console him. For example, Paphnuntius’s petition in the Latin text begins when he falls at the abbot’s feet, saying, “Ora pro me, Pater,

quia non possum sufferre dolorem de filia mea, sed magis ac magis de die in diem renovatur et crescit vulnus meum, et tribulatur anima mea.”⁶⁷ Unlike his counterpart in the Old English redaction, here Paphnuntius is “nimis afflictu[s],”⁶⁸ and the unbearable nature of his grief foreshadows his later thoughts of suicide. In the Old English translation, Smaragdus tells Paphnuntius, “Læt nu þine micclan cwymlinge,”⁶⁹ when it is *cwealm* [death] that the source text is referring to. There, Smaragdus refers to Paphnuntius’s suicidal tendencies directly: “Sine jam, sine; quid temetipsum interficis contristando? Sed age gratias Deo, nihil desperans.”⁷⁰

By and large, Euphrosyne’s own emotional reaction and words of solace have been curtailed by the Anglo-Saxon redactor as well. According to Magennis, the translation at this juncture “is typically Ælfrician in its avoidance of the expression of intense emotional feeling.”⁷¹ As soon as Euphrosyne sees her father, “þa wearð heo eall mid tearum geond-goten,”⁷² and she hides her head under her cowl to avoid recognition.⁷³ This anxiety about recognition is repeated a second time in the Latin text: “Videns vero patrem suum in gravi mærore, compatiēbatur illi. Sed timens ne agnosceretur, et impedimentum ei faceret, volens autem eum consolari, dixit ei.”⁷⁴ Finally, their conversation ends with still more evidence of her concern: “Ut autem non agnosceretur per multa colloquia.”⁷⁵ Euphrosyne will ultimately accomplish both goals: Paphnuntius will be consoled, but he will not recognize her in the process. Yet only in the Latin text do we fully understand the saint’s own psychological struggle of competing motivations, for her disguise as Smaragdus cannot supplant her identity as Paphnuntius’s daughter.

The final prayer Euphrosyne shares with Paphnuntius is “þæt he þe forgife forebyrd . and gepyld . and þe getiðigie þæs ðe selost sy . and hire behefast.”⁷⁶ Although it will be answered on both counts, Paphnuntius apparently assumes that what is best for him is that he will see Euphrosyne again. Through this conversation, Smaragdus manages to reach through the depths of grief to calm Paphnuntius, who tells the abbot, with unwitting irony, “min mod is gestrangod þurh þisne broþor . and ic eom swa bliðe swilce ic mine dohtor funden hæbbe.”⁷⁷ Indeed, this dose of holy consolation remains effective for the next thirty-eight years, until Paphnuntius learns of Smaragdus’s impending death. The Old English version is somewhat cursory in its announcement: “þa gefylde smaragdus on þære netennysse . eahta and þryttig wintra . and befeoll on untrumnyse . and on þære eac forðferde.”⁷⁸ Yet the Old English translator has omitted the Latin narrator’s darker foreshadowing of Euphrosyne’s fate: “Et dum recedere vellet Paphnutius, anima illius compatiēbatur illi, facies ejus pallebat,

et replebatur lacrymis. Prae nimio autem jejunio et diuturna inedia sanguinem vomebat.”⁷⁹ Indeed, it is truly miraculous that she survived an additional thirty-eight years in this condition.

It is when he sees Smaragdus on his deathbed that Paphnuntius launches into his second lament:⁸⁰ “Wa me hwær synd nu þine behat þe þu me be-hete . þæt ic git mine dohtor geseon moste . efne nu we hæfdon sume frofre þurh þe . and þu wylt us forlætan . wa me hwa sceal mine ylðo afrefrian . to hwam sceal ic gan þæt me fultumige . min sar is getwyfyld . Nu hit is for eahta and þryttiðan gearan þæt min dohtor me losode . and me nan swutelung ne com . þeh ic his geornlice gyrnde . me hylt unaræfnedlic sar . to hwam mæg ic heonon-forð gehyltan . oððe hwilce frofre mæg ic onfon . eallunga þus heofende ic to helle niðerstige.”⁸¹ This second speech, triggered by Smaragdus’s demise, echoes Paphnuntius’s reaction when he first learns of Euphrosyne’s disappearance. They are almost exactly the same length, and both begin with the exclamation “Wa me,” which is repeated within the lament. Again Paphnuntius employs the *ubi sunt* motif, but his words seem rather inappropriate for mourning Smaragdus’s death; his demands are harsh, as he implicitly accuses Smaragdus of lying, while he continues to grieve for Euphrosyne, and for himself. The Latin text includes a disclaimer indicating that Paphnuntius would grieve the loss of both of his consolers: “Ecce non solum illam non videbo, sed tu, in quo consolationem modicam habebam, derelinques nos.”⁸² In the Old English redaction, however, Paphnuntius never realizes how fortunate he has been to have found consolation elsewhere after the loss of his putatively irreplaceable daughter. Finally, his desire to descend into hell, presumably at his own hand, is an extreme and sinful reaction to the death of a saint. Yet, as the reader knows by now, Euphrosyne always delivers what she has promised.

Paphnuntius will come to terms with the loss of his daughter by re-experiencing it as Euphrosyne dies the death of a confessor. It is at this juncture that the narrator confirms Euphrosyne’s experience of the divine foreknowledge of her exact time of death that is the confessor’s hallmark: “Ða onget smaragdus . se ær wæs eufrosina gehaten . þæt se dæg wæs to becumen hire geleorednysse.”⁸³ This is the narrator’s last opportunity to waffle in his use of pronouns, descriptors, and naming conventions, for as soon as she reveals herself, the narrator refers to Euphrosyne as female, unambiguously, for the duration of the text. Knowing that revelation of her identity, fulfilment of her promise, and the ultimate consolatory gesture to her father will not be possible until literally the last minute, Euphrosyne asserts the privilege of miraculous prescience by asking Paphnuntius to remain with her for the next three days. At that time, Euphrosyne delivers her last words, in compliance

with the conventions of the *uita*:

God ælmihtig hæfð wel gedihtod min earme lif and gefylled minne
willan þæt ic moste þone ryme mines lifes werlice ge-endian . næs þurh
mine mihta ac þurh þæs fultum þe me geheold fram þæs feondes
searwum ... Nelle þu leng beon hoh-ful be þinre dehter eufrosinan .
soðlice ic earme eom sio sylfe . and þu eart pafnuntius min fæder . Efne
nu þu me hæfst gesewen . and þin ge-wilnung is gefylled . ac ne læt þu
þis ænigne witan . ne ne geþafa ðu þæt ænig man minne lichaman þwea
and gyrwa butan þe sylf . eac swilce ic cyððe þam abbode þæt ic hæfde
miccle æhta . and ic him behet þæt ic hi hider ingesyllan wolde . gif ic
her þurhwunode . nu gelæst ðu þæt ic behet . forþam þeos stow is
arwyrðe . and gebide for me.⁸⁴

Euphrosyne begins her parting words by attributing to God the fact that she was able to live her life *werlice* [manfully]. This rhetoric makes God responsible for the disappearance of Paphnuntius's prodigal daughter, rather than Euphrosyne herself. The reader is able to process the multivalent meaning of these opening words immediately, but Paphnuntius cannot do so until he too learns Smaragdus's true identity. That Euphrosyne's motive for this revelation is to console her father is obvious in the words that precede and follow the announcement of her identity and the confirmation of the status of their relationship as father and daughter; she reveals herself specifically because she wishes that Paphnuntius will not worry any longer now that his desire to see his daughter has been fulfilled. Finally, Euphrosyne's last words reiterate her status as confessor because she provides her follower with a verbal will and testament regarding instructions for her burial and the administration of her affairs. This also enables Euphrosyne to keep her promise not just to Paphnuntius, but to the abbot, now that she has fulfilled her goal of remaining in the monastery.⁸⁵

Euphrosyne was willing to reveal herself on her deathbed in order to console Paphnuntius, but to the rest of the community she would prefer to keep her identity a secret, hence her instructions to Paphnuntius not to tell what he has learned or to display the evidence of her female body. This reticence is a sign of the saint's humility, for she knows that it is only with the revelation of her female nature that she will be hailed as a saint. Euphrosyne's concern for the fate of her body also harkens back to the reason why she left home in the first place; the word *lichaman* appeared only once previously, when the monk advised Euphrosyne to avoid the sexual pollution of marriage.⁸⁶ It was to protect her female body that Euphrosyne came to the monastery, and, despite her modesty, it is her female body that will now become an object of veneration through the final instance when the actions of the

men in her life inadvertently result in greater glory for the saint herself: Paphnuntius's inability to heed her dying wish. It is his histrionic reaction, falling on the earth as if he himself is dead, and lying there half-alive⁸⁷ that attracts the attention of the brothers in the monastery. Smaragdus's chaperone Agapitus, who runs to tell the abbot, then overhears this final lament: "Wa me min sweteste bearn . for hwam noldest þu ðe sylfe me gecyðan þæt ic mihte mid þe sylf-willes drohtian . Wa me þæt þu swa lange þe sylfe dyrndest . Hu aræfnodest þu þæs ealdan feondes searwa . and nu in-eodest on þæt ece lif."⁸⁸ Paphnuntius has now come full circle; the initial exclamation, "Wa me min sweteste bearn," echoes the opening words of his first lament.⁸⁹ Yet this lament also reverses the second one in that rather than resigning himself to hell, as he had done earlier, Paphnuntius must now seek eternal life in heaven if he wishes to see Euphrosyne again. Although the extent of his grief – the fainting and weeping – still seems extreme, this briefest lament of fewer than four lines ends as soon as he realizes that his daughter, once presumed dead, has achieved eternal life. As in the two previous soliloquies, Paphnuntius's speech is marked by repetition and rhetorical questions, and the reader again knows the answer to his riddle: that he himself is the reason why Euphrosyne could not reveal herself to him. It is perhaps with this realization that Paphnuntius, who previously described his own emotional torment as unendurable, now can shift his attention to Euphrosyne's miraculous endurance.⁹⁰

When the abbot arrives, he falls upon the corpse,⁹¹ praying, "Eufrosina cristes bryd . and haligra manna tuddor . ne beo þu forgitende þinra efenþeowa . and þyses mynstres . ac gebide to drihtne for us . þæt he gedo us werlice becuman to hælo hyðe . and us do dælnimende mid him and his halgum."⁹² The abbot addresses the saint not with the pseudonym under which she entered the monastery, but by her proper name: Euphrosyne. The abbot also acknowledges the saint's female identities as a bride of Christ and a daughter. His request for Euphrosyne to intercede for her "fellow servants" shows respect for the power of her prayers, now revealed to have been more efficacious than their own were. As a saint, Euphrosyne has set an example to be followed and, like her, the monks wish to come "werlice" to heaven; this word echoes both the initial description of Euphrosyne's "werlic" disguise and her dying words in line 287, where she acknowledged the fulfilment of her desire to end the course of her life "werlice."⁹³

In Euphrosyne's case, accomplishment of a "werlic" life is miraculous only because "heo wæs wif-hades man," as the rest of the community is about to discover.⁹⁴ Although the habit, alias, and austere practices she adopted appeared to be "werlic," Euphrosyne remained embodied as a "wif-hades man," and the fact that a woman achieved

“werlic” accomplishments is the very foundation of her sanctity. Thus, when the rest of the community realizes the true, female identity of the person who, for thirty-eight years, maintained a practice more austere than any man in the community, they glorify God, “se þe on þam wiflican . and tydran hade swilce wundra wyrcað.”⁹⁵ Such wonders are miraculous specifically because they have been worked through a woman, whose nature is of course assumed to be weak, and it is only Euphrosyne’s female identity that retroactively makes her past seem holy. This invocation of Euphrosyne’s weakness recalls the monks’ weakness in the face of sexual temptation, which resulted in the abbot’s decision to place Smaragdus in isolation.⁹⁶ While this situation seemed to punish the innocent unfairly, the resulting solitude is actually more conducive to the saint’s own wishes, and, after her death, this putatively weak woman will become an example of spiritual strength for these demonstrably weak men. Their weakness in the face of sexual temptation may also have something to do with Euphrosyne’s desire to keep her body concealed after her death. Nonetheless, Euphrosyne’s female body becomes the site of her posthumous miracles, as when God’s power works through “þam wiflican hade” to heal a one-eyed brother, who is restored by kissing “þæt halige lic.”⁹⁷ Her feminine role as daughter enables one final posthumous miracle when Paphnuntius dies on the tenth anniversary of her *dies natalis*.⁹⁸

For the Anglo-Saxon audience of the *uita* of Saint Euphrosyne, Euphrosyne’s female gender is integral to her sanctity; this is not, after all, the *uita* of Saint Smaragdus, for masculine monastic piety is more mundane than miraculous. Despite her disguise as a eunuch, Euphrosyne’s female identity is hidden and revealed, but not effaced. It is upon coming out that she is revered as a saint, for only now may her past be interpreted correctly, as the accomplishments of a saintly woman. In reclaiming Euphrosyne as a female saint, we must consider the significance of the text’s genre alongside the saint’s gender. Because female saints far more often appear in *passiones* than in *uitas*, the very fact that Euphrosyne lives and dies according to the conventions of the *uita* is significant. Unlike the martyr Eugenia, whose monastic career ends with the revelation of her body, Euphrosyne’s deathbed confession is what enables the veneration of her life as a female confessor, and her death by natural causes therefore becomes the saint’s most transgressive act.

7 More Genre Trouble: The Life of Mary of Egypt

PAUL E. SZARMACH

A standard trope of scholarly work begins with an observation that a particular work, author, literary movement, or some combination of these has suffered neglect or some form of enforced literary obscurity, thus leading the writer to seek to correct or modify significantly the shortcomings of previous scholarship and criticism. This rhetorical situation does not quite obtain when it comes to the Old English Life of Mary of Egypt. Rather, this chapter will offer an inversion of the trope form: a focus on inversions. This writer must begin by citing the excellent edition of *The Old English Life of Saint Mary of Egypt* by Hugh Magennis, which provides the primary foundation for all subsequent study, given its classic nature as a “full service” edition.¹ The collection edited by Donald Scragg, featuring essays by Catherine Brown Tkacz, Andy Orchard, Clare A. Lees, and Robin Norris, marks an advance in the understanding of this Old English life.² Erich Poppe and Bianca Ross expand the range of the discussion with their collection of twelve essays on the tradition with special reference to insular sources, including a Latin text edited by Jane Stevenson and based on three insular manuscripts (collated with the Rosweyde edition in PL 73).³ Linda Cantara has brought the study of the text into the digital age with her thesis on the version extant in London, BL Cotton Otho B.x.⁴ Mary of Egypt studies in the Old English context thus are thriving, and it is within this context that the chapter seeks to extend this lively interest by considering select generic features of this Old English Life.

Here the dominant analytical or methodological stance is the Jaussian “horizon of expectations.”⁵ The Life of Mary of Egypt will challenge and expand our horizon of expectations for saints’ lives as well as for Anglo-Saxon literature and culture generally.⁶ It will subvert intellectually whatever our understanding and experience of the genre of female saints’ lives may have been, causing what Robin Norris calls in [chapter 6](#) “genre trouble.” This trouble, it will be seen, is broadly parodic in the sense that it imitates in a contrapuntal way certain features of virgin martyr stories.⁷ Comparisons with and analogies to less “troublesome” holy narratives will enable a sketch of the horizon of expectations. While it may seem doubtful that this parodic strain ever becomes burlesque, that is, ridicules the features of virgin-martyr stories, Mary of Egypt illustrates the possibilities that a form of

Manuscript Context

Genre trouble begins with the manuscript context. Fred C. Robinson has argued forcefully for the consideration of manuscript context and its contribution to meaning.⁹ Codicology, which one may describe as the study of the technical features of the material text, has been around for a long time, but it is the direct connect between these material features and the reading of a given piece that Robinson has highlighted. For the Life of Mary of Egypt the baseline manuscript is BL Cotton Julius E.vii, which Skeat enshrined in his edition of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*.¹⁰ There is enough clear manuscript evidence to date the manuscript to the beginning of the eleventh century, which might make it contemporaneous with an older Ælfric, whose death date is finally unknown, and there is record of the manuscript at Bury St Edmunds in the thirteenth century.¹¹ The manuscript, written mainly in one hand but with other hands evident at crucial points, displays a lively tradition of correction and alteration through sixteenth-century glosses: in short, it was no dead manuscript. Neil Ker, citing the two prefaces, Latin and OE, and the style of most of the Lives, indicates that these features "vouch for Ælfric's authorship of the collection as a whole."¹² It is with this observation that I would offer a different reading of the same facts that Ker presents. From BL Royal 7. C. XII, which contains Ælfric's first series of Catholic Homilies and Ælfric's interventions there, especially in the margins, it is clear that Ælfric could bring an authorial interest to the works produced in the scriptorium.¹³ But there is no such authorial intervention in the Julius manuscript. The Latin note at the end of the Life of Martin (fol. 203r), surely by Ælfric and embedded in the text, hints at the previous manuscript version, if not more in that retrogressive chain that codicologists love to imagine for a given codex.¹⁴ Manuscript features in Julius offer even more problematic features for the collection "as a whole." There is a contemporary list of contents on fol. 4v, but it is wrong. The Life of Mary of Egypt (art. 31) is not on the list, apparently added later to the collection. In his analysis of the placement of this Life Peter Clemoes suggests that Mary of Egypt joins the collection as a fill-in for some empty space on a gathering gone short.¹⁵ The list also has a complicated miscount: item XVIII is absent, while the Lives of Agatha and Lucy are counted as one, not two, as are doublet texts of Agnes, Mark, Alban, Swithun, Abdon, and Sennes, and the triplet on the Machabees (XXV). The Life of Euphrosyne (XXIII) is out of liturgical order, coming too late in the year (in November, when February is the

correct month). *De memoria sanctorum*, which reads like a general introduction to a volume on saints and serves as one in another manuscript, finds itself out of order in Julius as XVI. The last three pieces on the list, none of which is a Life, offer a ragged end: *Interrogationes Sigwulfi* is present, *De falsis diis* is incomplete, and *De XII abusivis* is lost. Fair enough: not all of these problematic features are relevant to the task at hand. The miscellany at the end can be taken in either of two ways: perhaps the compiler saw nothing so special about the collection that s/he would violate in bringing in a few nice, extra pieces or s/he, unlike manuscript librarians who serve us and we who read manuscripts, did not fetishize manuscripts. There is a further problem with Ælfric's Life of Eugenia, arranged for the first life in the Julius manuscript. Although her feast day is Christmas Day, Eugenia must yield the first place to the Christ child. Even so, the homily on Christmas is not a saint's life, nor are the OT translations and a few miscellaneous pieces that further dilute the content integrity of the manuscript. No one has questioned the attribution of the Life of Eugenia to Ælfric, and it seems safely ensconced where it is. The guess is that this Life, placed at the beginning of the manuscript not far from the Prefaces, reflects the Ælfrician intentions articulated in the Prefaces.

What the manuscript context tells us, then, is that the final shape of Julius is not Ælfric authorized, that the Life of Mary of Egypt is a problematic addition, and that the compilers, in general, were rather casual in some of their procedures. While Julius gives us much, it does not give us a fully conceptualized or executed manuscript upon which to construct easy or grand claims regarding contents and expressed or implied cultural values (compared, for example, with the best manuscripts of the Catholic Homilies). But the late arrivals to the presumed original Ælfrician collection in Julius E.vii should not on the other hand lead to their dismissal from consideration. It is here that one can argue the presence of the Life of Eugenia as a counterbalance and a set of somewhat complicated expectations regarding Ælfric created by previous scholars. The general scholarly consensus on Ælfric is that he is a sober and restrained writer, unlike the writers of the Vercelli Homilies or the Blickling Homilies, who writes in a plain style that avoids emotionalism or, as Rosemary Woolf would have it, avoids presenting garish, spectacular action and "sensational novelettes."¹⁶

The Cotton text begins with two Ælfrician Prefaces, one in Latin and one in Old English, both occurring only in Julius E.vii, where Æthelweard (d. c. 998) and Æthelmær "the Fat" (d. ?1017), *père et fils*, powerful *ealdormenn* in the southwest of England and Ælfric's literary patrons, receive mention.¹⁷ Certainly Æthelweard could read both

versions, for he translated a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* into Latin, and it would not be unlikely that Æthelmær could do the same.¹⁸ Here the Latin does not quite function as an “elite code” in the face of these two magnates, designed, as Latin often is, to keep those unlettered in Latin out of the loop. Why both versions exist next to each other has evoked no particular explanations. They are not mirror images, though they cover some similar ground. The key seems to be that in the Latin *père et fils* are cited, whereas in the vernacular they are directly addressed. The Latin is an explanatory Preface meant for other readers or other authorities. The major points in the Latin for our purposes are several. Ælfric says that he seeks to edify an audience desiring edification, setting forth the passions and the lives of saints venerated not by the common people but rather by monks, but he does not promise that he will write many translations lest the “pearls of Christ” be treated with disrespect. He will keep quiet about *Vitas patrum*, which contains many *subtilia*, which even he himself cannot understand. Peter Jackson warns us that what the work called *Vitas patrum* might mean to Ælfric and to the Anglo-Saxons is somewhat unclear, given a wild textual tradition.¹⁹ Some later compiler of Ælfric’s collection evidently did not respect Ælfric’s intention about the *Vitas patrum*, but amplifies his selection of monastic literature by adding the Life of Mary of Egypt; in other words, the compiler responsible sought to re-establish the presence of the *Vitas patrum*. Now why Ælfric on his own included Eugenia, given his expressed misgivings about “subtle literature,” can be only a matter for conjecture at this time. Ælfric ends his discussion of his intentions, methods, and translation techniques by noting the request by many of the faithful, especially Æthelweard and Æthelmær, and by indicating that he will soon end his career as a translator. In one sense Ælfric wishes to offer a bridge between the laity and the monastic orders, but it is a bridge with caution signs.²⁰

The OE preface begins with a direct address to Æthelweard and Æthelmær, acknowledging their request that Ælfric translate the lives and passions of the saints and emphasizing that the lives chosen are of those saints whom the monks venerate in their offices. The major part of the vernacular Preface is a gloss on Psalm 67:36, “*Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis*” [wonderful is God in His saints]. Ælfric celebrates the miracles of the saints and the innumerable list of them in a hymn of praise that ends with the theme of their intercessory power and his desire to compose a book as an encouragement and as a moral safeguard for mankind. Ælfric’s last words are an order to scribes to copy correctly according to the exemplar and not to add more than he translated. It is thanks to the disobedience of scribes and compilers, inverting if not subverting, Ælfric’s intentions, that the Life of Mary of

Egypt has come down to us in the Julius version.²¹ Here Ælfric's expectations are happily unrealized, so that later generations can discern the lively Old English prose tradition surrounding the master stylist of Eynsham.

Narrative, Structure, and Dialogue

If there was ever a “sensational novelette,” as Rosemary Woolf would have it, the Life of Mary of Egypt surely qualifies as four-star. The primary story, sometimes abbreviated and sometimes elaborated, starts with Mary as a twelve-year old runaway to Alexandria, where she worked in the “entertainment business,” singing and dancing and offering her sexual favours free. She is part of a group of saints known as “repentant harlots,” most of whom are from Antioch.²² Jane Stevenson has adduced the moral analysis of Thomas of Chobham, a theologian active in Salisbury in the early thirteenth century, who observes that Mary was no prostitute because she did not accept money.²³ Prostitutes are wage-earners and, though it is wrong to be one, anyone who is a prostitute is not wrong to receive a wage. It is worse to do the deed for pleasure, Thomas says, and in the case wage is as evil as the act. Such fine moral discrimination does not enter into the OE text. Mary's seventeen-year career in Alexandria ends when a tumultuous crowd, rushing to the sea to book passage for Jerusalem for the Exaltation of the Cross, sweeps her along with them. Mary wants to join the group, but has no passage money. Instead she offers herself to ten young men, who take her up on the offer. What Thomas de Chobham would make of this form of barter is not clear, but since exchange value is involved, one might infer that Thomas would have to consider it a wage, and thus Mary's action would be less culpable than her usual free licentious activities. Yet there is something preposterous about the whole sailing episode. The exchange of sexual favours for passage-money was possibly business as usual, but to make such a deal to go on a pilgrimage to see the Cross is rather over the top. The matter seems to be blasphemous or sacrilegious from one angle, and possibly bitterly comic, as vice can sometimes be, from another (as in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*). The audience may suffer moral horror as it learns that Mary continues her ways in Jerusalem, but is there an author somewhere having the best of it, here letting slip a bit the authorial veil of high seriousness?

At any rate no lightning strikes Mary. When she attempts to enter the church door where everyone else has easy passage, she cannot do so. Four tries are four failures, leading to weeping and self-confession of the errors of her life. Mary prays before an icon of the Virgin Mary

for permission to enter the church, and her request is granted on the condition that she forsake her former life. Filled with spiritual mysteries from her experiences in the church and directed by the icon's voice, Mary heads for the Jordan River, crosses it, and lives for some forty-seven years until she meets the monk Zosimus, to whom she tells her life's story.

Zosimus also travels a moral distance to meet Mary, but the journey is less pyrotechnical. The initial narrative focus of the *Life* is on Zosimus. Having entered the monastery as a child, from his mother's womb, in fact, Zosimus spent fifty-three years there enjoying a life of spiritual success. He was so perfect in his observances that monks from elsewhere came to follow his example in monastic observances and to learn doctrine from him. He was granted the privilege of divine illumination, so that he fulfilled the beatitude found in Matthew 5:8: "Eadige beoð þa clænheortan forþan þe hi God geseoð" [Blessed are the pure of heart because they shall see God]. Yet Zosimus was assailed by certain thoughts, saying [to himself?]: "hwæðer ænig munuc on eorðan sy þæt me mage aht niwes tæcan oððe me on ænigum ge fultumian þæs þe ic sylf nyte oððe þæt ic on þam munuclicum weorcum sylf ne gefylde oþþe hwæðer ænig þæra sy þe westen lufiað þe me on his dædum beforan sy" [whether there can be any monk on earth who can teach me anything new, or advance me in any thing of which I myself know nothing, or that I have not fulfilled in monastic works, or whether there be any of those who love the desert, who can be before me in his deeds].²⁴ An angel appears to tell him that he is not perfect and that a greater conflict lies ahead for him. Indeed, Zosimus, in order to come to know how many other ways there are to salvation, is directed to leave the monastery and to go to another at the Jordan, which the narrator describes in idealized terms. Come Lent, the monks begin their special observance where they leave the monastery for the desert, each with minimal provisions, to find God individually. Twenty-six days into Lent, having seen no persons and no animals, Zosimus catches a glimpse of a woman, sunburned dark with a head of hair white as wool. The description of this encounter seeks to replicate Zosimus's confusion by offering several possibilities that run through his mind: a human form, an evil spirit, indeed a woman, and finally the black and white form. Zosimus is about to learn about those other ways of salvation when Mary begins to tell her story.

This initial encounter has its awkward moments. First of all, there is a chase of sorts. Mary may have given her body away before, but now she runs off. Despite his old age, Zosimus, who was to have been a wandering solitary, rushes after her. Eventually, they face off across a dried-out stream [a wadi?], where Mary is out of frontal view but

within earshot. She discloses that she is a naked woman and asks for his mantle. She covers herself over where, we are told, she was most able to and where she had greatest need. Somehow Mary knows Zosimus's name, which inspires him with fear, while the particular exchange of clothing with a naked woman of grotesque possibilities apparently does not. The text offers no further elaboration of Mary's nudity here, and indeed how could a writer do so without becoming clinical or periphrastic or perhaps violating the notion of classical decorum? Less becomes more, as the scene is left for the reader/hearer to imagine what body parts need to be covered. What visual meaning does the audience confer on this scene? A manuscript illuminator would have had no choice but to produce visibilia, but a writer can leave much to the imagination. There has to be a moral risk if the mere mention of nudity will appeal to the concupiscence of the audience and have the opposite effect of the moral intention. This same awkwardness resurfaces when Zosimus finds Mary's lifeless body at what would have been their last meeting. Zosimus performs a funeral ceremony, washing her feet with his tears but not daring to touch any other part of her body, we are told. With the help of a friendly lioness, who mysteriously appears, Zosimus is able to bury Mary in the hard ground as naked as she was when Zosimus first saw her except for the torn strip of clothing he had given her.

The contemporary scholarly consensus is that in the final analysis the Life is less about Mary than it is about Zosimus and through him the Life's male audience. That said, this consensus splits in several directions.²⁵ Jane Stevenson makes a strong argument that the Life of Mary, whatever its possible "real" sources in history, derives from eastern monastic literature of the fourth through sixth centuries, where male paranoia about women, who are more lustful than men, obsessed and insatiable as they are, holds sway. Peter Brown has described "the ascetic literature of Egypt as a repository of vivid anecdotes concerning sexual seduction and heroic sexual avoidance ... women were a source of perpetual temptations to which the male body could be expected to respond instantly. For a nun simply to pat the foot of an elderly, sick bishop was considered enough provocation for both of them to fall instantly into fornication."²⁶ Brown's comment has immediate application to Zosimus and his reluctance to touch Mary. In his zeal for further moral perfection Zosimus had to be on guard, and he seems to know it. Of course, Zosimus has put himself at risk by his rather high opinion of himself. When the angel directed him to find out more about what it means to be perfect, his injunction was a sufficient explanation to establish that Zosimus is the central and exemplary character who will learn from experience. It is a form of Christian irony that Zosimus

learns about perfection – the desired result – from someone who was once a remarkable sinner. Monks have two special moral situations they must avoid. One is *accidia*, a special form of depression that occurs from disgust over doing good; that is, prayer and practices wear one out, particularly when there is no evident result.²⁷ Another is Pelagianism, that is, the belief that one can achieve his own salvation by his own efforts without grace. Zosimus would appear to have been on his way to a form of Pelagianism.²⁸ His statements about what he knows constitute a smugness reflective of a Pelagian tilt. The almost free and easy sexuality that Mary displays early in her life could almost be an analogue for the idea of natural virtue, which is one of the ideas embedded in Pelagianism.

The brilliance of the Life of Mary of Egypt as hagiographical literature comes from the moral risk that the unknown author took in crafting what at times approaches soft pornography to make a point about perfection to a monastic audience. Zosimus is seduced by perfection, not by the flesh, as Mary was initially. Zosimus and Mary are a complementary pair: both see moral perfection beyond their respective past histories. When the author creates a rhetorical tease to appeal to the prurient interest of the audience, he is not exactly like Aldhelm on the bridge singing pagan songs to get the attention of his hearers before he tries to convert them to Christianity, yet the author of the Life does perform a literary bait and switch as Mary moves from sexpot to saint in her telling. He must have had a great deal of confidence in his ability to foreclose any possible unfortunate misunderstanding. Stevenson argues that early permutations of the Latin story maintain a nuanced complexity of the various elements of the Life, while post-Conquest versions tend to simplify.²⁹ Here I have tried to suggest that the OE version carries forth the same level of nuance in their idiom.

The basic structure of the narrative is that of a frame tale, where the story of Zosimus frames the story of Mary of Egypt. Such framing allows the author to carry forward the life of a celibate monk and a repentant harlot through a series of contrasts, some of them starkly obvious. The monastic morality at issue, which is essentially the quest for moral perfection, sets up the frame for a story detailing gross moral imperfection. The closing of the frame poses some interesting problems. After Zosimus buries Mary with the help of that friendly lioness, the narrative loop comes to a quick conclusion. The monks at the minster hear the story from the beginning, praise God, and establish her feast day. The narrative problem of telling Mary's story yet again to the monks in the story may find its solution in this abbreviated account of the aftermath, but the narrative effect may mean that the story speaks

for itself in the presence of the Old English monks who constitute the present audience for the *vita*. The story is the “Q.E.D.” and thus needs no further recitation. The mention of Abbot Iohannes and his correction of the customs of the monastery, as “seo halige ær foresæde” [the holy one had earlier foretold], come as a surprising theme for a work that centres not on community issues but rather on personal salvation. Perhaps more text is missing than we have immediate evidence for. The final comment is about Zosimus, who continued his monastic life for 100 years, thus evidently achieving the peace he sought. Within the overall narrative structure there are several themes or motifs that invite further consideration, more pointedly with virgin martyr stories.

The Woman Teaches

The major character problem in the Life of Mary of Egypt centres on a woman who teaches a man, specifically a reformed harlot who teaches a monk. Holy women do teach men, always by their example of course, but also more overtly in the explanation and exposition of Christian doctrine. Ælfric offers several examples, none more apposite for comparison here than Cecilia, who is steadfast in her virginity through marriage and death and effective in her teaching so as to convert many around her. Cecilia’s holy *aristeia* begins in her marriage bed, where “þæt snotere mæden” (note the neuter forms!) begins to convert her evidently worthy but pagan husband Valerian to Christianity. Cecilia has a guardian angel who helps protect her virginity, a claim that Valerian views with some doubt. Valerian wants the angel to appear and, if the apparition is really a man who knows her carnally, he will kill him. When Cecilia talks Valerian into baptism by Pope Urban, the angel appears to convince Valerian of one God, one faith, and one baptism. The baptized Valerian returns home, where he and Cecilia receive crowns shining with the redness of roses and the whiteness of lilies, the angel providing the crowns. Because Valerian now loves chastity, the angel grants him a special request, and Valerian asks that his brother Tiburtius be converted. The round of conversions, begun by Cecilia’s teaching of Valerian, now begins in earnest. Cecilia and Valerian present the Christian truths to the brother, who learns from both. Tiburtius pays Cecilia a high compliment:

Ne þincð me þæt ðu spræce mid mennisce spræce
ac swilc Godes engel sylf spræce þurh þe.

[It seemeth not to me that thou speakest with man’s speech,
but as if God’s angel himself spake through thee].³⁰

The brothers become miracle workers, antagonizing in the process the wicked prefect Almachius. Almachius orders Maximus, his executioner, to dispatch the brothers, but Maximus and his household convert only to face an angry Amalchius, who has Maximus beaten to death with scourges. Cecilia becomes a public and active proselytizer who gets her opportunity to confront Almachius. Cecilia's death is rather gruesome, for the executioner's three strokes at the neck are unsuccessful. Because the senate's decree forbade a fourth stroke for criminals, Cecilia lived on for three days.

The Lives of Cecilia and Mary of Egypt share reflective and contrastive thematics. At first glance, the sexuality in each *vita* would appear to be diametrically opposed to the other. Cecilia, Valerian, and the mysterious angel offer a strange *ménage à trois*. Cecilia, a Christian from childhood, is full of faith and love for the eternal life. She faces marriage because her "friends" wished it.³¹ The intended is Valerian, a noble young man, whose worthiness is immediately established by the narrator's mention that he is now a holy saint. The marriage night is about sex withheld, and it is withheld in major part by the threat of violence from an angelic presence (at least from Valerian's point of view). Still the marriage continues with Christian sanction because it is chaste. The consideration of sex becomes the first step in a cycle of conversions. In the Life of Mary sex is likewise the apparent first step in moral conversion, if not change of heart. Mary of Egypt is not so much about sex withheld as it is about sex too freely granted, at least up until conversion. In the narrative the conversion is really double, since both Mary and Zosimus arrive at a state of perfection and the rest of the monastic community undergoes reform.

The teaching relationship in each is a relationship based on a power differential. Cecilia has knowledge of the true God, while her final adversary, Almachius, does not. Strikingly, the verbal struggle between Cecilia and Almachius is overtly couched in terms of power. Almachius asks Cecilia, "nast þu mine mihte?" [do you not know my power?] (LS 34.313, 374), to which Cecilia replies, in a cheeky comparison, that his power is very much like a bladder full of wind, which, when punctured, releases its wind. Despite this allusion to his moral flatulence, Almachius asserts his power over her life, and Cecilia says he may be able to kill, but he cannot raise the dead. Almachius orders her to worship the gods, and Cecilia tells him to perform a kind of empirical test to see that what he calls gods are stones. Almachius then orders the final punishments, which do not overpower the teaching saint in the face of eternity and even, one may observe, on the earth, for the three strokes by the executioner do not, after all, dispatch her.

Mary of Egypt likewise occupies the moral high ground as she teaches Zosimus about moral perfection. Quite obviously Mary has attained her apparent beatitude not by chastity but by its inversion. Yet this Life is not about the triumph of Mary's lurid experience over Zosimus's chaste innocence. The power differential is rather more subtle than what may be found in the struggle between Cecilia and Almachius, for it involves issues that affect the monastic life (see the discussion of Ælfric's Prefaces above, pp. 144–5). The narrative premise that Zosimus needs to learn more about moral perfection seems forced in the face of his continuing success. As noted above, an angel directs Zosimus to leave his home monastery for another so that he might perceive and understand “hu miccle synd opre hælo wegas” [how great are other ways of salvation] (*LS* 23B.60, 6), promising as well a greater struggle to come than what has passed. Presumably, the angel's words counter Zosimus's smug self-estimate that he is on the path to perfection. Zosimus does, after all wonder whether “ænig munuc” can teach him anything; he could not have imagined that any harlot (or anyone else) had anything to teach him. Zosimus should know, however, that he is at the edge of the pit of Pelagian pride. Or is Zosimus really a moral fool in need of more instruction than he imagines?

One further example of the teaching woman that may cast light on the Life of Mary of Egypt comes from the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla.³² This text presents a model for a narrative wherein the focus is on the acts of women at the expense of the men whom they encounter. Without going into the speculation that this apocryphon was written for a women's audience, contemporary analysis does describe a narrative where even St Paul comes off the worse. Thecla is a virgin who refuses marriage to follow Paul. Transfixed by Paul's preaching “like a spider at the window bound by his words,”³³ Thecla upsets her betrothed and her mother. Demas and Hermogenes, presumably Paul's travelling companions, betray him by urging Thecla's intended and her mother to appeal to the governor, who will then execute Paul. The governor imprisons Paul, but Thecla bribes her way into the jail to hear him. The governor has Paul scourged and driven out of the city, but Thecla faces a pyre, is miraculously saved by rain and hail, Paul and Thecla are reunited, and Thecla promises to cut her hair and follow Paul. Paul, however, seems discomfited by the attention, saying, “the season is unfavourable, and thou art comely.”³⁴ Nevertheless, the two head off to Antioch, where one Alexander falls in love with Thecla at first sight. Alexander asks Paul about Thecla, but he denies knowing her: “I do not know the woman of whom thou dost speak, nor is she mine.”³⁵ Thecla humiliates Alexander by tearing his clothes. The

governor seeks to throw Thecla to the beasts, causing an uproar among the women of the city, particularly Tryphaena, a rich woman who takes Thecla under her protection. The beasts do not harm Thecla in the arena, nor is she harmed when she throws herself into a pit full of water inhabited by seals. Thecla then announces that she has baptized herself. Impressed, the governor releases her as she praises God for her deliverance. Thecla seeks out Paul, who, we are told, pondered “whether another temptation was not upon her.”³⁶ Evidently freed from spiritual dependence upon Paul, Thecla returns home to her mother. She continues her preaching until death. Stevan Davies offers this thematic summary of Thecla’s trials: “First she must avoid the advances of her betrothed husband and the Syrian Alexander. Second she must endure the torments of civil authorities, who punish her because of her determined sexual continence. Third she must struggle to break through Paul’s misapprehension of her as nothing more than a beautiful woman, weak and subject to temptation.”³⁷ Thecla’s heretical self-baptism and her aggressive preaching are striking, but so is the strange case of the apostle to the Gentiles. In this narrative Paul is rather consistently *beneath* his milieu and thus a figure of irony. Paul chooses bad companions in Demas and Hermogenes, misconstrues and diminishes Thecla’s faith and devotion in several ways, and, above all, denies any connection to her (in the manner of Peter in the garden) when Alexander makes his advances. Paul is not the moral centre of this apocryphon, but the comparison of Paul with Zosimus works on this level: Zosimus too should know better than he does about moral perfection. He too is *beneath* his moral milieu if he does not know “hu miccle synd opre hælo wegas” [how great are the other ways of salvation] (LS 23B.60, 6). Zosimus is in an ironic position that probably should be read with minimal comic possibilities.

The Body: Beauty and the Tease

Within the fundamental narrative premise of a “repentant harlot” is the physical description of Mary in the desert (a major inversion). There is no explicit description of Mary as a harlot in the city, though one can infer that she must have been attractive and enticing at least in some way.³⁸ Since biographical information comes from Mary herself, she would have to describe herself to Zosimus or to relate her attractiveness through a report of the reaction of others, which would also require the author to have a rhetorical method to offer such a description without any moral dangers. Mary does characterize herself as lust driven, but gives no particulars of her manner or demeanour or dress. Mary’s appearance in the desert, seen through the consciousness

of Zosimus, moves through a set of stages as he begins to comprehend what/who he is seeing, as if it were a succession of visual images. Mary is first someone “on mennisce gelicnysse on lichaman” [in human likeness in the body] (LS 23B.168, 12), who frightens Zosimus because he thinks it is “sumes gastes scinhyw” [a delusion of some kind of spirit] (LS 23B.170, 12).³⁹ Fortified by a sign of the cross, Zosimus next discerns a “wifman,” made dark by the sun’s heat (a gratuitous explanation) and contrasted with a head of hair as white as wool and only down to her neck, which is as lengthy a description as the *vita* provides for her. What he is seeing is now “wuldorfæstan” [glorious, miraculous], but apparently still confusing, for, as we are told, Zosimus had encountered neither human nor animal during his wandering in the desert. Zosimus desires to know “hwæt þæt wildeora wære” [what sort of wild animal it might be] (LS 23B.183, 12).⁴⁰

A Historical Thesaurus of Old English presents a wide variety of terms for “beauty, fairness, elegance, comeliness.”⁴¹ One of the more recurrent words used to convey these concept(s) is “wlitig” and its forms, occurring some 209 times and used rather generally, if not with any discrimination and particular force.⁴² Ælfric relates that Agnes was “wlitig on ansyne and wlitigre on geleafan” [beautiful in her looks and more beautiful in her faith] (LS 7.13, 170). He says that Cecilia inspires the heathens to weep that

swa wlitig fæmne,
and swa æþelboren wimman mid wisdom afylled,
wolde deað þrowian on witum, swa iung.

[so beautiful a maiden
and a woman so nobly born, filled with wisdom, should
suffer death in torments, so young.] (LS 34.290–2, 372–3)

Neither description receives any elaboration beyond the level of generality. Even Judith, though no virgin martyr, is “ælfscinu” [lit. “elf-bright”], a word that presumably suggests something like a preternatural beauty; nevertheless, her beauty receives no elaboration.⁴³ At least Mary receives a measure of description, with her deep sunburn and hair white as wool. The description of Mary is functional, for it is part of the passage wherein Zosimus is trying to understand what he is seeing. This particularity, minor as it might be, requires a move away from the flat description of characters typical of hagiography.

The latent possibility of a “beautiful” Mary becomes actual in later literature when, as Simon Gaunt puts it, the legend of Mary was

“rewritten to become more charged with erotic and courtly overtones.”⁴⁴ In the “T version” of the twelfth-century legend, the narrator announces that he will say something about her beauty. Among several general statements that Mary was an exceptional beauty the narrator describes white ears, bright eyes, black eyebrows, blemish-free nose and cheeks, a neck white as ermine. The narrator does not shy away from Mary’s other endowments, for

Les mameles de cele dame
N'estoit pas mennres d'une pome.

[This lady’s breasts were not smaller than apples.]

And,

Gent cors avoit et bien mollé,
Sous l'aissele lonc le costé.

[She had a beautiful soft body along her flanks and belly.]⁴⁵

The general medievalist will see in this description of Mary-in-the-city the standard introduction to the courtly lady and, more generally, a place in the literary tradition where earlier and later medieval literary forms may divide. The stark contrast is between the Old English and the Old French, for the Old English Life of Mary shows a clear inversion of the commonplace of “the beautiful virgin,” while allowing for some minor particularities.

In the Old English Life Mary’s body in the desert is the occasion for two awkward moments, as already noted above: at first sight and at death. When Zosimus is able to cry out to the fleeing Mary to stop and they confront each other across the dried-out stream, Mary identifies herself as “wifhades mann” [a person of the female sex] (*LS* 23B.206–7, 14), thus putting an end to Zosimus’s confusion of what/who Mary might be. Mary evidently has her back to Zosimus, for she asks him for his mantle so that she might cover her “wiflican tyddernysse” [womanly weakness] (*LS* 23B.211, 24) and turn to receive his prayers. Zosimus throws the mantle to her, it is clear, but exactly how he throws it is not. Zosimus undoes his mantle “þe he mid bewæfed wæs on bæcling gewend hire to wearp.” The Skeat translation reads: “with which he was clothed, and turning his back, threw it to her” (*LS* 23B.218, 14). Zosimus would appear to be looking first at Mary’s backside and then executes some sort of backhand manoeuvre in his throw. Does he avert his gaze, a gesture unmentioned, as he throws? If

he is looking at the less shameful side, why does he need to turn away? How Mary receives the mantle and clothes herself “*be þam dæle þe heo mæst mihte and mæst neod wæs to beheligenne*” [about the part that she most required to do and (which there) was most need to conceal] (*LS* 23B.220, 14) may help the audience imagine the toss. The lack of detail clouds the visualization of the action. Stevenson notes the “faintly comic concern for the proprieties here.”⁴⁶ On the whole, the treatment of Mary’s body in this passage suggests the “attraction-repulsion” dynamic of ascetic literature.⁴⁷ Presumably this passage is another illustration of the generalizing tendency of hagiography at the expense of detail.

The second passage describes another potential tease. In this encounter with Mary Zosimus comes across her body “*orsawle licgende*” [lying lifeless] (*LS* 23B.742, 48). Washing her feet with his tears, Zosimus does not dare to touch any other part of her body. He sees a writing from Mary that directs him on how to proceed with commemoration and burial. Zosimus notes what Mary had told him before, viz., that she was illiterate, and the apparent miracle of her literacy receives no amplification. Rather, Zosimus is pleased finally to know Mary’s name, since she effectively has signed the message! As he begins to struggle with digging a grave, a lioness [*seo leo*] appears to assist him; having protected himself with the sign of the cross, he urges the beast to work with her claws so that “*wit*” [we two (note the dual)] might bury the holy body. The details of the burial are significant:

and swa þone lichaman on eorðan oferwreah [he], swa nacode swa he hi ærest gemette buton gewealdan þæs toslitanan rægeles þe he Zosimus hire ær towearp, of þam Maria sumne hire lichaman bewæfde.

[and so he covered the body over within the earth, as naked as when he first saw her except for the protection of the torn garment which Zosimus had formerly thrown her, from which Mary had covered her body.] (*LS* 23B.790–3, 52–3)

The recollection here of the first naked encounter serves to tighten the narrative structure and to complete the story of Mary. Mary’s body remains a thematic centre, now effectively sanctified by the message and the lioness. A helpful lion/lioness appears at burial in monastic literature, notably Jerome’s *Life of Paul*, and here it is easy to see its presence as divine approbation for her burial rites.⁴⁸ Mary’s body can be no temptation, real or imagined, as it becomes in effect an immediate relic, giving witness to her holy ascetic life.⁴⁹

At the Brink of Jest

It is common belief that humour or comedy has no particular place in Christian literature, despite the efforts of several scholars to make a case for it. Ernst Robert Curtius, in an all-too brief discussion, outlines the case in an excursus on “jest and earnest in medieval literature.”⁵⁰ He observes that humorous elements “are a part of the style of medieval *vita sancti*” and that these elements were “present in the material itself, but we may be sure that the public expected them as well.”⁵¹ Saint Lawrence on the grill, asking his torturer to turn him over in order to barbecue the other side, is a very cheeky and well-known example of unexpected humour in martyrdom. If the Latin tradition allows both jest and earnestness, then there can be no surprise that the Anglo-Saxon tradition follows. Shari Horner and Hugh Magennis offer two important articles on humour in Anglo-Saxon saints’ lives.⁵² Horner focuses on Ælfric and his virgin-martyr stories, notably those about Lucy, Cecilia, and Agatha.⁵³ The young maidens are sharp with their tongues and firm in their faith (as we have seen Cecilia to be), exposing the foolishness of their pagan persecutors, outwitting them in verbal conflict, and in the process teaching the Anglo-Saxon audience. The defeat of the torturers confirms the foolishness of evil.

Acknowledging that Ælfric is not at all interested in the comic potential of his material, Magennis finds a sharp contrast provided by the anonymous author of the Legend of the Seven Sleepers.⁵⁴ This *passio* (or so the narrator calls it) of seven stalwart Christians who sleep for 372 years takes liberties with some standard features. For example, Decius, a Roman emperor who is hostile to Christians and their beliefs and practices, never once merits the customary epithet *wælhreow*, used in Old English martyrs’ stories. In fact, the Christian seven were the emperor’s dearest followers, who, though in his household, remain Christians as he persecutes others. When Decius confronts his seven, they do not respond with abuse and he does not consign them to torture or death. Rather, they get a reprieve from any severe sentence, as he travels off to continue his persecutions elsewhere. When Decius returns to Ephesus, he indicates his unhappiness that his “dyrlingas” have escaped. Treacherous kinsmen betray the seven, but yet the emperor surprisingly does not act according to form, considering what he should do because “he him hearmian nolde.” It was God who then inspired Decius to order the enclosure of the seven into their cave on the Celian Hill. God wanted the seven to rest there until He chose to manifest them.

If the selective mildness Decius displays in his persecution is a remarkable reversal of generic expectation and likewise the positive intervention by God in the intention of the emperor surprises, then the comic dimension of the plight of the Seven Sleepers is even more

startling. When the seven wake up, they believe that they have slept only the night. Preparing a strategy to deal with the long-dead Decius, they send their steward Malchus into town to buy bread and to gather intelligence concerning Decius and his intentions. The complications of plot that ensue are the stuff of situation comedy. Malchus is a stranger in a strange land. He sees the Cross of Christ at every town gate, observes town architecture in a different style, and hears talk that affirms allegiance to Christ. Malchus cannot comprehend the triumph of Christianity. When he tries to purchase bread, he encounters a currency problem, for the pennies he uses are out of date. The merchants accuse Malchus of finding a gold treasure of some antiquity, which frightens him, for he now believes that everyone has recognized him and now he sees that the only way out is to let the merchants keep both the pennies and the bread he had sought. The narrator enters Malchus's mind to portray his fear and timidity. He has a continuing fear that he will be brought before Decius. Unable to establish his identity before the townspeople, Malchus is taken to Bishop Marinus and the "town-reeve," where interrogation continues, leading to the town-reeve's threat of torture. The bishop tells Malchus that there is no emperor on earth named Decius, and these soft words begin the unravelling of the mystery and misprisions. The bishop, the town-reeve, and the people learn the full story of the Seven Sleepers at the cave, rejoicing at God's grace and mercy. Bishop Marinus writes to the "good" emperor, Theodosius, who hastens from Constantinople to Ephesus to participate in the glorious recognition scene that ends the story. More implied than overtly stated and presented, this version of the Legend does illustrate the doctrine of the resurrection of the body in an engaging way.⁵⁵ Malchus is something of a fool as he works through his situation with fear and trembling, but he is endearing in failing to reckon God's interventions and presence in human affairs. The dramatic irony, which keeps all the characters in the dark, but not the audience (and, of course, God), serves as an effective vehicle for the inculcation of doctrine.

The Legend of the Seven Sleepers has a special, manuscript link to the Life of Mary of Egypt. Both texts share a moderately complicated history in the assembly of Julius E.vii. The Legend of the Seven Sleepers (Skeat's XXIII) precedes the Life of Mary of Egypt (Skeat's XXIIIB), the latter apparently joining the former as something of a late addition, for the main scribe does not list Mary of Egypt in his table of contents. Peter Clemoes suggests that the main scribe copied Skeat XXII, then continued with Skeat XXIII, and, to catch up with some resultant blank quiring, added Skeat XXIIIB; thus, Skeat XXIII and XXIIIB came together for the first time in Julius E.vii.⁵⁶ The sources for

these texts would then be Latin translations with Greek associations and origins, and with those origins the range of the Greek romance comes into view.

The foregoing establishes the general possibility of humour and jest in the lives of saints, but can there be any application to the Life of Mary of Egypt? Magennis suggests that for modern readers there is humorous incongruity in details such as Mary's remarkable seventeen-year diet or Zosimus's swift run across the desert to overtake Mary or the mutual prostration for hours as Mary and Zosimus seek each other's blessing.⁵⁷ These models and precedents, however amusing for modern readers, lack the sometimes uncomfortable moments of sexuality found in the Life of Mary and, one may argue, seem within the range of "normal" saintly behaviour. The best analogue for holy sexuality with comic/ironic overtones occurs in the Old English poem *Judith*, where sex and violence, with an apparent humorous admixture, create an atmosphere that even exceeds the strange blend in the Life of Mary of Egypt. The key scene occurs after Judith kills Holofernes and the Hebrews mass to attack. The Assyrians seek their lord, but he remains in the tent where he had spent time with Judith:

Beornas stodon
ymbe hyra þeodnes træf þearle gebylde,
sweorcendferhðe. Hi ða somod ealle
ongunnon cohhetan, cirman hlude
ond gristbitian gode orfeorme,
mid toðon, torn þoligende. Ða wæs hyra tires æt ende.

[Warriors stood around their lord's tent, severely gloomy, their spirit darkening.

All of them together began to hawk and hem, making loud noise, alienated from

God, grinding their teeth, suffering grief. Then was their glory at an end.] (my translation)⁵⁸

The key word here is "cohhetan," often translated or interpreted to mean "cough," but, as Mark Griffith explains in an excellent note to line 270a, the word might be better glossed as something like "hawk and hem repeatedly."⁵⁹ The retainers are very unhappy that their lord has had his sexual pleasure (so they think), as they, on the other hand, consider the coming battle and their destruction. Here, too, dramatic irony adapted to Christian purpose has a devastating tonal effect: the humour is deeply sardonic.

The Life of Mary of Egypt and the Legend of the Seven Sleepers show

the possibilities of Greek romance in its hagiographic form. Zosimus and Malchus are holy fools who will be saved, for both extend their moral experience in their respective stories. Zosimus has to overcome his Pelagian tendencies in the monastery and to receive, ironically, instruction and example from a repentant harlot in the desert. The inversion of situations begins to create a pattern where the expected characteristics of hagiographic romance – for example, torture, sexual temptation, right doctrine or teaching, conversion, and extreme piety – receive a makeover: torture, for instance, does not really exist in this work, and sexual temptation will be only an unsatisfied tease. To understand the extra narrative dimension of the Life of Mary of Egypt the Christian audience must be ready to see the inversion of generic expectations.

Not Virgin, but Martyr

Although the virgin-martyr genre echoes and counterpoints the Life of Mary of Egypt, what is, finally, Mary's saintly status? It is absolutely certain that Mary is no virgin. Robin Norris, making the argument that Mary is a confessor-figure, brings together several motifs found in the Life of Mary that help make the case for this characterization.⁶⁰ These include the manner of her death, her premonition of death, and her spiritual guidance and counsel.⁶¹ Yet the official title "Confessor," in later times conferred by the pope, seems to have traditionally described men.⁶² But Mary of Egypt may qualify as "martyr" because of the expanded notion of what martyrdom could mean when the persecutions came to an end in the early fourth century. Edward B. Malone surveys the tradition of the monk as the successor of the martyr and presents Martin of Tours as the prime example of a saint who has the glory of a martyr.⁶³ In his *Epistola secunda ad Aurelium Diaconum* Sulpicius Severus explains how Martin (who is known traditionally as a confessor), qualifies for martyrdom:

Nam licet et ratio temporis non potuerit praestare martyrium, gloria tamen martyris non carebit, quia voto adque virtute et potuit esse martyr, et voluit.

[For, although the conditions of the time could not provide him with martyrdom, nevertheless he will not lack the glory of a martyr because both by desire and virtue alike, he could be and wanted to be a martyr.]⁶⁴

Sulpicius amplifies further by describing what and whom (Nero, Decius) real martyrs face and by listing the ascetic practices that are

akin to physical martyrdom:

Sed quamquam ista non pertulerit, implevit tamen sine cruore martyrrium. Nam quas ille pro spe arternitatis humanorum dolorum non pertulit passiones, fame, vigiliis, nuditate, ieiuniis, opprobriis invidiorum, insectationibus improborum, cura pro infirmitatibus sollicitudine pro periclitantibus?

[But even though he did not suffer any of these things, yet he achieved a martyrdom without blood. For what throes of human suffering did he not endure for the hope of eternity, in hunger, in vigils, in nakedness, in fastings, in the insults of the envious, in the persecutions of the wicked, in the care of infirmities, in solicitude for those in danger?]⁶⁵

Mary of Egypt clearly falls within the scope of the holiness that Sulpicius here describes for Martin.

Conclusion

The select generic details assembled here, both external evidence and internal evidence, suggest but do not exhaust the interplay of genres. It is a simplification to label the Life of Mary of Egypt as a “repentant harlot” story and leave it at that. The compiler of Julius E.vii, as the de facto first OE scholar-critic of the piece, implicitly saw that the Life of Mary of Egypt could find a place in a collection otherwise associated with lives written by Ælfric of Eynsham. The work itself, whatever its potential claims as a guide to moral excellence, suggests through its inversion of generic features a challenge to the “horizon of expectations” of its readers. This challenge startles the audience, forcing it to consider the boundaries of what the holy might be and how it might be attained. The move is certainly rhetorical, but it is finally rhetoric linked to a moral meaning. Admittedly, there is more to consider in the Life. Larger themes such as “the city and the desert” relative to monastic practice or the figure of the Virgin Mary as a foil to Mary of Egypt (or vice versa) would require a move towards a monograph. So too would a review of narrative issues derived from an almost “realistic” perspective: how did the illiterate solitary learn to write and to know so much about the moral life? Is it a disregard for narrative probability, as in Zosimus’s imperfect perfection as a motive for action? Or, perhaps, is it in a way yet to be investigated a comment on preternatural gifts restored by living a solitary life? In its selectivity this chapter, one might hope, suggests the evident success of generic inversion.

Mothers

8 “*Nutrix pia*”: The Flowering of the Cult of St Æthelthryth in Anglo-Saxon England

JOHN BLACK

Introduction

While even a cursory survey of the cults of the saints clearly indicates their widespread popularity and enduring importance within the Christian tradition of Europe and the Mediterranean world throughout the Middle Ages and thereafter, the study of saints' cults has often been undermined by an assumption that saints' *lives* and images are static, stable, and unchanging – an assumption misguided at best and problematic in practice, as it hinders proper understanding of the significance of medieval hagiography. As closer examination shows, the developing corpus of hagiographic representations in medieval Europe was coloured and enlivened by an abundance of variation in the portrayals of saints. An analysis of the variations introduced into the corpus of materials, both narrative and visual, for a given saint over the course of the Middle Ages can elucidate the social, cultural, and historical significance of these changes.

Through examination of this dynamism, as seen in both textual and iconographic sources for the cult of Æthelthryth (c. 635 – c. 679), the evidence suggests that the saint was envisioned as a new “path” in the *via sancta* for seventh- and eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England. In her role as virgin queen and abbess, she expands the range of “types” of saints in Anglo-Saxon England, adding to the niche that, for example, Cuthbert fills as *pastor*, bishop, and hermit, or that Guthlac inhabits as warrior hermit. And, like Cuthbert and Guthlac, Æthelthryth expands this range by “translating” into a specifically Anglo-Saxon milieu a niche previously established elsewhere in Christendom. Furthermore, while the initial focus for the cult is on Æthelthryth's corporeal virginity (an emphasis that constructs a very narrow “niche” for the saint and, perhaps more important, is potentially problematized for some medieval audiences by connotations of barrenness), this focus seems to be extrapolated in the course of the Anglo-Saxon period beyond the more exclusive literal and physical parameters of virginity to embrace the more inclusive and spiritually grounded notions of chastity and steadfastness and, most important, the fruits of these

virtues.¹ Æthelthryth thereby comes to be constructed not only as “virgin mother” to those in her immediate care as abbess in a few, brief decades in the latter 600s, but also as a type of influential “*nutrix pia*” (as Bede terms her in his *Chronica maiora*, Year 4639) for a long and flourishing line of saintly “offspring” beyond seventh-century Ely and beyond the world of religious foundations. This substantive and somewhat paradoxical shift in emphasis, from virginity, sexual constraint, and enclosure to steadfastness and generative, nourishing spirituality, not only promotes the flowering of Æthelthryth’s cult, but also constructs it in ways that work to elide the distinctions and limitations of gender, place, and time that might otherwise easily hinder any broader appeal.

Much rich critical study in recent years has contributed significantly to our understanding of the cult of Æthelthryth.² One particularly fruitful topic for insightful scholarship has been the privileging of the saintly nurturer in the works of Bede and in other medieval English hagiographic sources on female saints. However, given medieval Christianity’s idealization (often to the point of dichotomy) of the rarified and the spiritual versus the mundane and the corporeal, the expression of this privileging is perhaps less enigmatic than are the details of its construction.³ In order to explore fully the construction of the saintly nurturer, the focus of this chapter deliberately re-examines primary sources, textual and iconographic, for the saint deriving from the Anglo-Saxon period, with particular attention devoted to how the sources manifest this seemingly paradoxical concept of fruitful chastity – that is, how they may be seen to treat the shift from the narrow emphasis on corporeal virginity to the more inclusive notion of chastity/steadfastness and resultant fruitfulness, a significant and agile shift. It is through the variations and changes in the presentation of the saint in various sources that this transformation is elucidated. Specifically, the sources examined for the current study are as follows:

Stephanus, *Vita S. Wilfridi* (c. 715), chapters 19 and 22

Bede, *Chronica maiora* (c. 725); entry for the year 4639

Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* (c. 730); IV.19–20

Old English Bede (9th c.); IV.19 (21)

Old English Martyrology (9th c.); entry for 23 June

Ælfhelm, *Book of Miracles of St Æthelthryth* (c. 950; interpolated/preserved in *Liber Eliensis*, i: 43–9 (c. 1170)

Ælfric, *Lives of Saints* (c. 995)

Benedictional of St Æthelwold (c. 975); fols 2r, 90v

Background for Æthelthryth (Etheldreda, Etheldritha, Audrey)

Early accounts of Æthelthryth suggest that she was born c. 635 of a noble family. Her father, King Anna, and her three sisters were “leading lights” of the conversion-era church in Anglo-Saxon England. Tradition holds that Æthelthryth remained virginal through two marriages, and it is this characteristic that seems first to have caught the eye of her early hagiographers. She retires to a monastery c. 672, then establishes a monastery of her own at Ely c. 673, where she draws a following, wields considerable influence, and inspires her wards. Æthelthryth dies at Ely c. 679. At a translation c. 695, her body and shroud are found incorrupt, and her shrine at Ely is subsequently recorded as the locus of various miracles. The early popularity of her cult (feast day 23 June) is attested by the extant *vita*, *miraculi*, references in Ely documentary materials, church dedications, and commemorations in sculpture and architecture. And, as Reginald of Durham’s (fl. 1170) oft-cited comment on the popularity and efficacy of England’s “big three” during the twelfth century (i.e., Cuthbert, Edmund, and Æthelthryth) suggests, the stature of her cult persisted well beyond the Anglo-Saxon era. As the cults of numerous other early saints were not so fortunate in their longevity, the question arises as to how/why Æthelthryth achieved her enduring popularity and status, which leads to an examination of the evolution of her cult for evidence of changes or variations that construct an ongoing resonance for the cult among medieval English audiences.

Æthelthryth in Stephanus

Bede often provides the earliest references to Anglo-Saxon saints; in the case of Æthelthryth, however, an earlier, if brief, account occurs in chapters 19 and 22 of Stephanus’s *Vita S. Wilfridi* (c. 715).⁴ While the detail that Stephanus offers regarding Æthelthryth is rather scant, it is nonetheless significant in at least two respects: it is the earliest extant written foundation for the hagiographic tradition for Æthelthryth, and it is what we presume was available to Bede as written tradition regarding Æthelthryth for his subsequent development of the tradition.⁵

Stephanus’s work is primarily a paean to Wilfrid, celebrating the bishop’s successes, praising his response to challenges, and commemorating his connections with other important figures of the era. It is within this context that Æthelthryth appears twice in the *Vita*, in accounts in chapters 19 and 22 of Wilfrid’s early successes. The depth of the ties between the two figures, as well as the prominence of Æthelthryth’s standing in Anglo-Saxon culture, is perhaps also reflected

in Wilfrid's attendance (as reported by Bede in *HE* IV.17, 19) at Æthelthryth's translation c. 695, when the incorruption of her body and shroud were discovered. Stephanus's mention of Æthelthryth is, as noted, brief:

In diebus autem illis Ecfrithus rex religiosus cum beatissima regina Æthiltrythae, cuius corpus vivens ante impollutum post mortem incorruptum manens adhuc demonstrat, simul in unum Wilfritho episcopo in omnibus oboedientes facti, pax et gaudium in populis et anni frugiferi victoriaeque in hostes, Deo adiuvante, subsecutae sunt.

[Now in those days, the pious King Ecgrith, and his most blessed Queen Aethilthryth (whose body, still remaining uncorrupted after death, shows that it was unstained before, while alive) were both obedient to Bishop Wilfrid in all things, and there ensued, by the aid of God, peace and joy among the people, fruitful years and victory over their foes.]⁶

Here, regarding Æthelthryth, Stephanus emphasizes, perhaps not surprisingly, Æthelthryth's obedience to Wilfrid. But, even before noting her obedience, Stephanus presents Æthelthryth as queen, as incorrupt, as virgin, and, later in the text, as donor of an estate for the foundation at Hexham. Neither Ely, nor Æthelthryth's dying, nor her translation, nor any miracle merits mention; but even here, at the outset of the hagiographical record, Stephanus's language, most pointedly in his use of "frugiferi," evokes connections between Æthelthryth's virginity and spiritual steadfastness, on the one hand, and notions of fruitfulness, mentorship, and donation, on the other – the very traits that serve to establish her as a *nutrix pia* figure and that come to characterize the saint. Thus, Stephanus's brief treatment foreshadows the elaboration and extrapolation of the theme in subsequent representations of the saint.

Æthelthryth in Bede: *Chronica maiora*

When one first turns to Bede as source for Æthelthryth, it is not his *HE*, as one might expect, but another, often neglected, work – his *Chronica maiora* (c. 725)⁷ – in which Æthelthryth first appears. The *Chronica maiora* is a part of *De temporum ratione*, which is, in turn, an expansion upon Bede's *De temporibus* (c. 703). Within the framework of the *De temporum ratione*, the *Chronica maiora* chronicles the Six Ages of the World. While the narrative perspective of Bede's later *HE* is grounded in the British Isles, with contextualization in the larger Christian world, the perspective of the *Chronica maiora* may be said to be the inverse – a chronicle of the history of the Roman/Mediterranean world, to which

the author connects relevant events in the British Isles.

In the *Chronica maiora*, Bede alludes to Æthelthryth in his entry for the year 4639 (reckoning from the beginning of the world):

Sancta et perpetua uirgo Christi Edilthryda, filia Annae regis Anglorum et primo alteri uiro permagnifico et post Ecfrido regi coniux data, postquam XII annos thorum incorrupta seruauit maritalem, post reginam sumto uelamine sacro uirgo sanctimonialis efficitur. Nec mora etiam uirginum mater et nutrix pia sanctarum, accepto in construendum monasterium loco, quem Elige uocant. Cuius merita uiuacia testatur etiam mortua caro, quae post XVI annos sepulturae cum ueste, qua inuoluta est, incorrupta repperitur.⁸

[The holy and perpetual virgin of Christ, Æthelthryth, daughter of Anna, king of the Angles, was given as wife firstly to one great man and then to king Egfrid. After she had preserved the marriage bed uncorrupted for twelve years, having taken the holy veil she was transformed from a queen into a consecrated virgin. Without delay she also became a mother of virgins and the pious nourisher of holy women, and received the place called Ely in order to build a monastery. Her merits while living were also testified to when her body and the clothes in which it had been wrapped were found uncorrupted sixteen years after her burial.]⁹

The attention Bede devotes to Æthelthryth in the pages of the *Chronica maiora* may seem slight, but the significance that he attaches to her and her legacy becomes more emphatic if one considers that, within the scope of the *Chronica maiora*, only four saints active in Britain during the Anglo-Saxon era merit attention: Æthelthryth (Year 4639) is predecessor among the Anglo-Saxon saints, followed by Cuthbert (4652), Bishop Egbert of Iona (4670), and Abbot Ceolfrid (4671).¹⁰ Examination of this passage shows that it is here, in Bede's *Chronica maiora*, that audiences first learn of several details significant to subsequent tradition: Æthelthryth's twelve years of chaste marriages, her receiving of the veil, the foundation of Ely, and the incorruption of her shroud, along with her body. More important, however, for the purpose of this chapter, is Bede's characterization of Æthelthryth as "mother of virgins and the pious nourisher of holy women." Bede's language posits incorruption as evidence of merits (a type of vitality and fruitfulness). While her initial charism as virgin, incorrupt after sixteen years of burial, continues to be celebrated in the *Chronica maiora*, Bede has clearly come to be more attentive to the spiritual impact and significance of this trait: for him the significance seems to be not in her virginity itself, but instead in what that steadfastness of habit produced, in what she left behind, in her generative spirituality;

in a virginity – a sexual steadfastness – that paradoxically flowers, that produces and nourishes offspring, albeit of a spiritual nature. Bede further solidifies Æthelthryth's role as *nutrix pia* and as a new “path” in Anglo-Saxon sanctity.

Æthelthryth in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*

Although other accounts of Æthelthryth precede the *HE* account (c. 730), it is Bede's *opus magnum* that lays much of the fertile groundwork for the growth of the saint's cult.¹¹ Bede's presentation of the saint, in chapters 19 and 20 of Book IV, is contextualized within the larger scope and aims of the *HE* – to elucidate the spiritual history of the English. Within this framework, Æthelthryth is an exemplary figure, but one of many, each from different “modes” of spiritual life and each of whom strives to bring his/her will into concert with God's.

In chapter 19, Bede creates the most fully developed of the early accounts of Æthelthryth, elaborating on many of the points raised in the *Chronica maiora* and conveying Wilfrid's observations. Notably, however, he introduces other details as well: Æthelthryth preserves her virginity through two marriages, her virginity/chastity is “perfect,” her incorruption is construed as a sign of her chastity, her monastic life at Coldingham and Ely are highlighted (especially her ascetic habit at Ely), the notions of virgin mother and fruitful chastity are reinforced, accounts of her death c. 679 and translation c. 695 (with her body and shroud found incorrupt) are repeated, and accounts of post-translation miracles are added. In particular, Æthelthryth is hailed as “uirginitatis integritate gloriosa” [the glory of perfect virginity/chastity] and as virgin, but nonetheless fruitful, mother: “ipsa facta est abbatissa in regione quae uocatur Elge, ubi constructo monasterio uirginum Deo deuotarum perplurium mater uirgo et exemplis uitae caelestis esse coepit et monitis” [she was herself appointed abbess in the district called Ely, where she built a monastery and became, by the example of her heavenly life and teaching, the virgin mother of many virgins dedicated to God].¹²

While Bede's treatment of Æthelthryth in IV:19 would perhaps have been sufficient in itself, given the apparent popularity and widespread dissemination of the *HE*, to ensure her a place in Anglo-Saxon hagiography, the remarkable abecedarian poem in epanaleptic couplets found in IV.20, in both reflecting and promoting her importance in conversion era Anglo-Saxon England, further elevated her status. This lush poem, the *Hymn on Chastity* (see the appendix for the Latin text and Modern English translation), is Bede's manifesto on fruitful steadfastness. Here Bede invokes the Trinity in the initial couplet and

then, in the opening (B–E lines), situates his Hymn against Virgil’s (“Maro’s”) songs, Æthelthryth against Helen of Troy, devotion to the spirituality of steadfastness against submission to the vicissitudes of earthly desires, peace against war, and the glory of the City of God against the “glories” of Rome, all of which serve to associate chastity with the divine gift of peace. In the F–H lines, the Virgin Mary gives birth not only to the parent of creation, but also to many virgins/flowers.¹³ Her steadfast virginity, far from being associated with barrenness, produces a generative lineage, making many flourish, bloom, and shine. This lineage includes not only the pre-eminent virgin martyrs of the early Church (I–M lines), but also, in Bede’s own “age,” Æthelthryth (introduced in N line). In his elevation of Æthelthryth, Bede is bold – not in regarding her chastity per se, but in lauding the fruits of her steadfastness (of which chastity is one variety). His characterization of her in the P line evokes for her a role that bridges heaven and earth, that serves as vehicle to the eternal. In the Q–R lines, Æthelthryth, through her devotion to the Virgin Mary, becomes not only mother of Christ, but also *sponsa Christi* (eliding time and place). The S–T lines emphasize repeatedly Æthelthryth’s steadfastness, and what follows narratively (i.e., her incorruption and her role as conduit of God’s power to preserve, heal, and make whole) is derivative of that steadfastness. Æthelthryth flowers in/by her acts, by/in giving her soul to heaven. The V–Y lines link chastity, purity, incorruption, healing, and regeneration. Æthelthryth, through her steadfastness, does what Eve could not: she triumphs over temptation and presumption (Z line). The AMEN quatrain closes by characterizing chastity as a sweet hymn of praise to the Spouse and by emphasizing again Æthelthryth’s steadfastness. As is true for Mary, Æthelthryth’s virginity is primarily metonymy for her singular devotion to the will of God. Thus, the powerful conclusion of the hymn not only forges conceptual links among integrity, wholeness, oneness of wills, abundance, fertility, and generativity, but also simultaneously embellishes the role of Æthelthryth as *nutrix pia*, not only for her sisters at Ely, but for all who are given “ears to hear” of her example through the vehicle of Bede’s *HE*.

Æthelthryth in the Old English Bede

While Bede’s treatment in the *HE* is the richest of the early Anglo-Saxon accounts of the saint, several other important versions, both in Old English and in Latin, follow during the course of the next 250 years or so. The account of Æthelthryth in IV.19 (21) of the Old English Bede (9th c.), while not differing significantly overall from the Latin in the

HE IV, does omit the *Hymn* found in the Latin.¹⁴ It might be argued that the omission seems to undermine the honour accorded Æthelthryth and chastity; ultimately, however, the omission of the *Hymn* is perhaps most easily explained by the fact that its rhetorical and syntactical complexity is dependent upon its Latinity, in which case its absence is less a comment on the significance of Æthelthryth than on the difficulty of reproducing Bede's Latin poetics in Old English.¹⁵ Overall, the Old English Bede still serves to perpetuate the record of the cult of Æthelthryth, making it accessible to a wider audience by transmitting it (for the first time, if the Old English Bede is earlier than the *Old English Martyrology*) into the vernacular and thereby suggesting something of the importance attached to the central themes manifested in the saint's tradition.

Æthelthryth in the Old English Martyrology

The expansion of commemoration of Æthelthryth in the vernacular is not only continued, but also diversified into another genre in the entry found for Æthelthryth in the *Old English Martyrology* (9th c.).¹⁶ In the *OEM*, a collection of brief readings on Anglo-Saxon saints that seem to serve more as reminders for audiences than as expositions, the lections are arranged according to the liturgical calendar, wherein Æthelthryth's falls on her feast day, 23 June. The entry for Æthelthryth is quoted here in full:

On ðone ðreo ond twentegþan dæg þæs monðes bið þære halgan cwene geleornes Sancte Æþeldryþe; seo wæs twam werum gebrydod, ond hwæpre heo wæs clæne fæmne. Ærest heo wæs gebrydad Tondberhte, Suðgerwa ealdormen, ond æfter þam heo wæs seald Ecgferðe to cwene, Norðanhymbra cyninge, forþon þe heo wæs Onnan dohtor, Eastengla cyninges. Ond heo þa wæs twelf gear mid Ecgferð þone cyning, ond he mid nængum ðingum mihte hire geþoht oncerran. Þa onfeng heo haligryfte on ðam mynstre ðe is nemned Colodesburh. Þæs æfter anum geare heo timbrede fæmnena mynster on ðam londe þe we nemneð æt Elie. Ond heo wæs þær abbodysse, ond breac siððan wyllenra hræгла, ond seldon heo baðode on hatum bæpe butan foran to Eastrum, ond foran to þam Fiftigan Dæge, ond foran to Cristes fullwihtes dæge. Ond seldon on dæge heo eode oftor to gereordum þonne æne, ond fram uhtsanges tid heo a wunode on cierecean on hire gebede oð dæg. Ond þurh Godes gast heo self ær foresægde hwonne heo sceolde of middangearde leoran, ond heo þa geleorde; ond heo wæs sextene gear on eorðan bebyrged. Ond þa mon eft þone lichoman uppdyde, þa wæs he swa ungebrosnad gemeted, swa heo ðy ilcan dæge wære forðfered. Ond hire wæs micel wund open on ðam swyran ða heo mon on byrgenne dyde; ond þa hi mon eft uppdyde of þære byrgenne, ða wæs hit gebatad

After introducing Æthelthryth and her lineage, the *OEM* entry focuses primarily on the virtues of Æthelthryth's monastic life, but it also devotes, selectively, some attention to her incorruption, to the healing of her neck wound, and, of particular note for the purposes of this chapter, to her steadfastness, echoing Bede's *HE*. Her steadfastness is manifest not only through her remaining a "clæne fæmne" through two marriages, but also through her resolution with respect to Ecgfrith, which merits emphasis here: "he [Ecgferð] mid nængum ðingum mihte hire gepoht oncerran." This resolution serves as foil, highlighting the faithfulness of the *sponsa Christi* from Bede's Hymn. Not only theologically, but also rhetorically, Æthelthryth's steadfastness is generative: immediately following the account of Æthelthryth's resolution, as if linked by causality, are the martyrologist's accounts of the saint's establishment of a foundation at Ely, her flourishing in the ascetic life at Ely, and her incorruption (and indeed her generative healing) after death. Thus, the *OEM* entry, in linking steadfastness and generativity, evinces the pervasiveness of the topoi of *nutrix pia* and productive spirituality in yet another genre in the record of the saint.

Æthelthryth in Ælfhelm

A perhaps more curious representation of Æthelthryth (i.e., as punitive agent) is seen in an episode from Ælfhelm's *Book of Miracles of St Æthelthryth*, attributed to the Anglo-Saxon era (c. 950), but interpolated into and preserved in the *Liber Eliensis* (i:43–9) (c. 1170).¹⁸ The *Book of Miracles* purports to provide eyewitness accounts of events during the reign of Eadred (946–55) and thus serves, within the broader program of the *Liber Eliensis*, to record and validate assertions of ancient privilege made by the foundation at Ely. In the episode from Ælfhelm of interest here (*Liber Eliensis*, i:49), a punitive miracle is presented in dramatic context: an "archpriest" is sceptical of the efficacy of Æthelthryth; in response to this scepticism, an admonisher tells the archpriest of prior miracles and of the dire end of an infidel Dane who dishonoured Æthelthryth's tomb; the sceptical archpriest persists in his "testing" of the saint; Æthelthryth "responds" effectively.¹⁹

The *Book of Miracles*' narration of this episode evokes both the tradition of generation, with ironic results, and its opposite, extirpation. Here, as perhaps nowhere else in the tradition of the cult, it is manifestly clear that Æthelthryth's chastity is not merely some quaint construction of saintly restraint or sexual modesty; instead it serves as the locus of transformative power – in this case, negatively

transformative. The language of several excerpts will serve to illustrate the point.

A dramatic assertion from the closing lines of the account serves, in effect, to introduce the import of the episode: “Ecce quod infideliter dubitantis temeraria generavit presumptio”²⁰ [Behold what was engendered by the blind presumption of one who doubted in an infidel manner!].²¹ The play on the language of generativity is obvious: the inverse of steadfastness in the sceptical priest, his lack of faithfulness, and his presumption all “generate” (as the account relates) death and destruction – an utter lack of flowering and generativity. More specifically, exactly *what* was engendered is described in some detail: “Mox ingens pestis arripuit domum illius sacerdotis, que coniugem eius ac liberos omnes cita morte percussit totamque progeniem funditus extirpavit, ipsum quoque ad alterum commigrantem locum post paucos dies deduxit ad infernum”²² [Soon, a great plague seized the household of that priest, striking his wife and all his children with rapid death, and it utterly extirpated all his progeny; the priest himself moved to another place, but after a few days it also took him to Hell].²³ While Æthelthryth’s steadfastness flowers into healing (her own and that of petitioners), incorruption, and spiritual descendants, the priest’s lack of steadfastness produces a sterile void: disease, death, and elimination of all progeny.

The multiple juxtapositions between steadfastness and its lack continue:

Sed et ipsius ⁱⁱⁱⁱor fautoribus divina ultio peremit duos ocus. Tertius, cum esset institutus officiis litteralibus ecclesiasticis ac sacerdotalibus, ita protinus in amentiam versus, quicquid scivit est oblitus, quasi nichil didicisset penitus ... Quartus vero fuit prelibatus presbiter Alfelmus, qui et ipse gravi egritudine correptus ferme per viii menses mansit paralyticus, donec parentes mesti ac dolentes, quibus erat unicus, detulerunt eum cum plurimus muneribus ad beatissime virginis corpus.²⁴

[Moreover, of his {the sceptical priest’s} four accomplices, divine vengeance very quickly killed two. A third, who was trained in the scribal duties which belong to the Church and its priesthood, was immediately driven mad; he forgot all his knowledge, as if he had learnt absolutely nothing ... Now, the fourth was Ælfhelm, the aforementioned priest {i.e., who reported this matter}, who likewise was seized by a severe illness and for almost eight months remained paralysed until his parents, whose only son he was, in grief and in sorrow took him, along with very many gifts, to the body of the blessed virgin {i.e., Æthelthryth}].²⁵

In contrast to Æthelthryth's steadfastness, which proves beneficent to those in her care, the priest's presumption results in death, erasure of knowledge, or debilitation for those in his charge. Ælfhelm's recuperation (in the final lines of the excerpt above) further highlights the juxtaposition: although he himself appears to be numbered among the presumptuous, his parents are not – they seem to preserve (ultimately, at least) some hint of faithfulness, on behalf of which Æthelthryth intercedes as a vehicle for transformation. Thus, Æthelthryth serves as a nourishing mother figure not only for her own nuns at Ely, but also subsequently for those who ask for her intercession. The lesson is clear. To attempt to countermand Æthelthryth, who is characterized by her generativity and fruitfulness, is to invoke the inverse of her *nutrix pia* charismata: extirpation and lack of fecundity. The “infidels,” whether Danes or presumptuous, sceptical priests, who attempt to defile Æthelthryth and are subsequently destroyed, are contrasted with the faithful who respect the chasteness of Æthelthryth and are subsequently fruitful. More pointedly, in direct inverse contrast to Æthelthryth's legacy, the potential spiritual “progeny” of a presumptuous priest wither away and/or die (excepting the repentant Ælfhelm). To oppose Æthelthryth is to risk eradication of the potential fruits of posterity.

Æthelthryth in Ælfric

The vernacularizing impetus for the cult of Æthelthryth continues with the account of the saint found in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* (c. 995).²⁶ Included in a collection of sermons and lections that, as Ælfric stipulates, celebrates those saints whom the monks (vs. the laity) honour in devotions, the account draws heavily on Bede's treatment of Æthelthryth in the *HE*. Indeed, Ælfric refers to Bede (lines 24–30), asserting the contemporariness of the topic, and doing so in a way that serves as a “bookend” to the Abbot of Eynsham's closing exemplum (see below). In *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, Susan Ridyard asserts, “Ælfric adds nothing to Bede's narrative,”²⁷ and while this is perhaps true in terms of significant alterations, Ælfric does make some interesting, if subtle, elaborations.²⁸ In his treatment of Æthelthryth, Ælfric highlights the power of chastity in Æthelthryth's life (and, by extrapolation, the potentiality of steadfastness in the lives of hearers/readers) as a vehicle for the divine (or, conversely, the role of God as agent in the life of Æthelthryth and in the fruits of her life). In the opening lines, Ælfric seems to be concerned to make it clear that the fruitful miracles associated with Æthelthryth attest to her glory and chastity: “we wyllað nu awritan þeah ðe hit wundorlic sy be ðære

halgan sancte æðeldryðe þam englisca mædene þe wæs mid twam werum and swaðeah wunode mæden swa swa þa wundra geswutelioð þe heo wyrð gelome” [we will now write, wonderful though it be, concerning the holy Æthelthryth, the English maiden, who had two husbands and nevertheless remained a virgin, as the miracles show which she often worketh].²⁹ This link between virginity and miracles is again asserted less than fifteen lines later: “And twelf gear wunode ungewemmed mæden on þæs cynincges synscype swa swa swutele wundra hyre mærdā cyðað and hire mægðhad gelome. Heo lufode þone hælend þe hi heold unwemme and godes ðeowas wurðode an þæra wæs wilfrid bisceop” [And twelve years she lived in wedlock with the king, yet continued an unpolluted maiden; even as evident miracles often make known her sacred relics and her virginity. She loved the Saviour who kept her unspotted, and honoured God’s servants; one of these was Bishop Wilfrid].³⁰ The rhetoric of both excerpts emphasizes the connections between Æthelthryth’s steadfastness and her “works” – as the products of that steadfastness.

At the end of his account of Æthelthryth, and prior to his concluding exemplum on chastity, Ælfric once again returns to the matter of the saint’s preternaturally enduring vitality: “Hit is swutol þæt heo wæs ungewemmed mæden þonne hire lichama ne mihte formolsnian on eorðan and godes miht is geswutelod soðlice þurh hi þæt he mæg aræran ða formolsnodon lichaman seðe hire lic heold hal on ðære byrgene git oð þisne dæg. Sy him ðæs a wuldor” [It is evident that she was an unspotted virgin, since her body was not suffered to moulder in the earth, and in her, God’s power is very manifested, namely, to raise up corruptible bodies, in that He hath kept her body uncorrupt in her grave even unto this day; wherefore to Him be everlasting glory].³¹ Here Ælfric similarly makes explicit the links between chastity and resurrection, between steadfastness in the “here and now” and permanence in the hereafter (as noted in the *HE*, Ælfric’s “source”).

Interwoven among these allusions to generative power and vitality is Ælfric’s careful reiteration of Æthelthryth as nourishing mother figure: “And heo syððan wearð gehadod eft to abudissan on elig mynstre ofer manega mynecena and heo hi modorlice heold mid godum gebysnungum to þam gastlican life” [And she was then again instituted as abbess in the monastery of Ely, and {set} over many nuns, whom she trained as a mother by her good example in the religious life].³² While it may be argued that Ælfric is merely echoing Bede in each of these instances, it is nonetheless significant that he deliberately chooses to preserve and transmit in his vernacular rendition of the saint’s life these specific aspects of Bede’s account that highlight the generative power of the steadfast *nutrix pia* figure.

In addition to the changes wrought by selectively highlighting these thematic aspects, Ælfric also manipulates the narrative sequence inherited from Bede by “straightening out” the “problems” with chronology in Bede’s account. One of the primary effects of this arrangement is to allow Ælfric to achieve a better didactic effect – he can thereby end the *vita* with a moral, offer evidence (i.e., miracles) for the truth of the moral, and then provide a contemporary exhortative example that seems intended to show that the achievement of Æthelthryth is within the reach of the audience:

Oft woruldmenn eac heoldon swa swa us bec secgað heora clænnysse on synscipe for cristes lufe swa swa we mihton reccan gif ge rohton hit to gehyrenne. We secgað swaðeah be sumum ðegne se wæs pryttig geara mid his wife on clænnysse. Dry suna he gestrynde and hi siððan buta ðrittig geara wæron wunigende butan hæmede and fela ælmyssan worhton oð þæt se wer ferde to munuclicere drohtnunge and drihtnes englas comon eft on his forðsiðe and feredon his sawle mid sange to heofonum swa swa us secgað bec. Manega bysna synd on bocum be swylcum hu oft weras and wif wundorlice drohtnodon and on clænnysse wunodon to wuldre þam hælende þe þa clænnysse astealde crist ure hælend þam is a wurðmynt and wuldor on ecnysse. AMEN.³³

It bears noting that this exemplum regarding the thegn and his wife continues to shift the focus from corporeal virginity (neither is virgin) to chaste marriage, expanding the relevance and significance of the cult beyond the narrow understanding of Æthelthryth’s initial charism. Furthermore, given the patrons for *Lives of Saints*, the recipient audience for a didactic treatment of Æthelthryth’s epitomizing trait of steadfastness is similarly expanded and broadened, reaching male and female, lay and clerical.³⁴

Overall, Ælfric’s version of the life of Æthelthryth, like the other vernacular accounts, presents Æthelthryth from a new perspective and for a new audience, serves to perpetuate the record of cult of Æthelthryth, and transmits it in the vernacular of late tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England. While the indebtedness to Bede is clear and openly acknowledged by Ælfric, the subtle but significant adaptations made by Ælfric serve to broaden the significance and relevance of Æthelthryth’s cult: her model of steadfastness is extrapolated and expanded, no longer limited by a strict construction of the saint solely as virginal female, abbess, or cloistered and confined to Ely.

Æthelthryth in the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold*

Ælfric’s lection and the presentation of Æthelthryth in the *Benedictional*

of *St Æthelwold* (c. 975),³⁵ both products of the Benedictine Reform, serve as the Anglo-Saxon period's closing treatments of the saint. While the proximate, utilitarian purpose of a benedictional is to collect, along with other associated texts, the special prayers for use by bishops in pronouncing blessings over a congregation, perhaps the ultimate purpose of the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold* is to serve as vision/manifestation/promotion in text and image of the spiritual and ecclesiastical aspirations of the Benedictine Reform in Anglo-Saxon England.³⁶ Overall, both the *Benedictional* and the Benedictine Reform serve the function and aims of reformation, refoundation, "purification," and general promotion of ecclesiastical allegiance to spiritual steadfastness. While this movement was clearly concerned on a pragmatic level with "good" clerics vs. "bad," with reformed vs. unreformed, it just as clearly sought to address much larger theological and spiritual issues, and subsequently to promote a vision of radically reformed spirituality. It is in this context that the presentation of Æthelthryth in the *Benedictional* must be addressed. Representations of the saint in the miniatures of the *Benedictional* significantly transform and epitomize Æthelthryth's enlarging role and relevance, echoing and extending her "flowering," as seen in textual accounts.

Within the folios of the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold*, Æthelthryth appears twice: in miniatures on folios 2r and 90v.³⁷ The image on folio 2r, the Choir of Virgins singing God's praises, is rich and allusive,³⁸ but it is the second image (fol. 90v) that is perhaps most directly relevant to any discourse on generativity.³⁹ This full-page miniature, one textual "panel" of an iconic diptych in codex, features Æthelthryth, facing Christ in the other "panel." The inscription surrounding the saint reads, "Imago Sanctae Æpelðrypae Abbatisae ac Perpetuae Virginis" [the image of St Æthelthryth, abbess and perpetual virgin]. The multivalence of the image and its inscription epitomizes the role of the elision of the limits of gender, initial charism, place, and time that had been at work over the preceding centuries in expanding, via textual treatments of the saint, the appeal and relevance of the cult. From a seventh-century female saint intimately linked to Ely and "marked" (paradoxically) as *immaculata*, Æthelthryth is here transformed. The inscription introduces the discourse of time or, more precisely, of atemporality and perpetuality; here Æthelthryth is identified not solely as a virgin, but first, as an abbess, but not one linked merely to Ely or any other specific earthly foundation; also, she is here celebrated in a tenth-century Winchester codex made for a male lector and, presumably, for a primarily male audience. As a spiritual model, her role has expanded. In the context of the *Benedictional* (like Ælfric's coda), Æthelthryth can no longer be construed exclusively as a model

for female virgins, for abbesses, or for any gendered role.

Among the image's many "readings," however, perhaps the most significant is that in which it inherently *prima facie* places Æthelthryth visually and thematically at the heart of fecundity, echoing the flowering motif of textual precursors. While the pairing of Æthelthryth and Christ serves to evoke the pairing of the Virgin and Christ, along with all the fecund resonances of the Virgin Mary (**the Nutrix Pia**),⁴⁰ it is perhaps in the burgeoning vegetative motifs of the miniature that the allusions to fertility are most richly presented. The floral/flowering motif that is characteristic, in general, of the framing borders of the *Benedictional's* miniatures is most elaborated in Christ's Nativity and here in the diptych with Æthelthryth and Christ in Majesty (all models of fruitful steadfastness). The lush border features stylized acanthus, a common motif, which is often interpreted as a symbol of regeneration and thus would be especially appropriate here. (It would also echo the resurrection motifs seen in Bede's and Ælfric's accounts of the saint.) The flowering motif is repeated in the rendering of Æthelthryth's left hand: she offers a flower (often identified as a lily, representing chastity) to Christ, symbolizing her steadfast devotion to him. In return, Christ blesses Æthelthryth. The themes, images, and language of flowering and generativity noted in earlier textual accounts of the saint are visually brought into vivid, ornate focus in Æthelwold's showcase collection.

More broadly, beyond the immediate symbolism of lily and acanthus, the iconography of flowers and vegetation indirectly evokes other resonant "moments" of steadfastness and generativity: the Entry into Jerusalem/Palm Sunday,⁴¹ the blossoming of virtue, notions of paradise, and the cloister as garden – all relevant in "translating" the polyphonic iconography of the image. These images reflect the summation of Æthelthryth's charism of fruitful steadfastness, for which physical sexual restraint is mere metonymy. Here, in an era of revivalist and reformist thinking almost 250 years after Bede, the *Benedictional's* celebration of generative chastity, of Æthelthryth as *nutrix pia*, echoes Bede's *Hymn*. As evidence of the *nachleben* of the *Hymn*, the iconography seen in the *Benedictional's* presentation of Æthelthryth contradicts the notion, sometimes posited, of the *Hymn's* isolated, peripheral, or quaint nature.⁴² As a culmination of the evolutionary trajectory of Æthelthryth's cult in Anglo-Saxon England, the *Benedictional* elevates a fully transformed Æthelthryth – a figure with relevance and appeal far beyond that afforded by the initial focus solely on her corporeal virginity.

Conclusion

Tracing the dynamism seen in textual and iconographic representations of Æthelthryth is intimately significant in understanding not only the growth and development of her cult, in particular, but also the ways in which the evolution of the cult represents an expansion of conceptualizations of sanctity in Anglo-Saxon England. Initially, as an adaptation of the virgin-martyr “type” from Mediterranean Christianity, Æthelthryth complements the earlier and contemporary saints of the Anglo-Saxons, such as Cuthbert (bishop, monk, hermit), Gregory (apostle, administrator), Guthlac (warrior hermit), and Mary of Egypt (penitent and teacher of monks), thereby expanding the assembly of “types” in the Anglo-Saxon “pantheon” of saints. Of greater significance ultimately, however, is the profound reconfiguration of Æthelthryth’s charism, from an initial focus on sexual constraint to an emphasis on the spiritual generativity of steadfastness, from corporeal virgin to spiritual *nutrix pia*. Through an evolution of treatments that “frees” Æthelthryth from the exclusive niche of female virgin in seventh-century Ely and serves to broaden the appeal of her cult by working to elide limits of time, place, and gender, Æthelthryth is transformed into an inspiration for Christian spiritual devotion in late Anglo-Saxon England and, in particular, into a model for a range of audiences within the fold of the aspiring steadfast.

Appendix: Bede’s *Hymn on Chastity* (HE IV.20)

Alma Deus Trinitas, quae saecula cuncta gubernas,
adnue iam copetis, alma Deus Trinitas.

Bella Maro resonet; nos pacis dona canamus,
munera nos Christi; bella Maro resonet.

Carmina casta mihi, fedae non raptus Helenae;
luxus erit lubricis, carmina casta mihi.

Dona superna loquar, miserae non proelia Troiae;
terra quibus gaudet, dona superna loquar.

En Deus altus adit uenerandae Virginis aluum,
liberet ut homines, en Deus altus adit.

Femina uirgo parit mundi deuota parentem,
porta Maria Dei femina uirgo parit.

Gaudet amica cohors de Virgine matre Tonantis;
uirginitate micans gaudet amica cohors.

Huius honor genuit casto de germine plures,
uirgineos flores huius honor genuit:

Ignibus usta feris uirgo non cessit Agathe,
Eulalia et perfert ignibus usta feris,
Kasta feras superat mentis pro culmine Tecla,
Eufemia sacras kasta feras superat,
Laeta ridet gladios ferro robustior Agnes,
Cecilia infestos laeta ridet gladios.
Multus in orbe uiget per sobria corda triumphus,
sobrietatis amor multus in orbe uiget.
Nostra quoque egregia iam tempora uirgo beaut;
Aedilthyda nitet nostra quoque egregia.
Orta patre eximio, regali et stemmate clara,
nobilior Domino est, orta patre eximio.
Percipit inde decus reginae et sceptrum sub astris;
plus super astra manens percipit inde decus.
Quid petis, alma, uirum, sponso iam dedita summo?
sponsus adest Christus; quid petis, alma, uirum?
Regis ut aetherei matrem iam, credo, sequaris,
tu quoque sis mater regis ut aetherei.
Sponsa dicata Deo bis sex regnauerat annis,
inque monasterio est sponsa dicata Deo,
Tota sacrata polo celsis ubi floruit actis
reddidit atque animam tota sacrata polo.
Virginis alma caro est tumultata bis octo Nouembres,
nec putet in tumultu uirginis alma caro.
Xre, tui est operis quia uestis et ipsa sepulchro
inuoluta nitet; Xre, tui est operis.
Ydros et ater abit sacrae pro uestis honore;
morbi diffugiunt, ydros et ater abit.
Zelus in hoste furit, quondam qui uicerat Euam;
uirgo triumphat ouans, zelus in hoste furit.
Aspice, nupta Deo, quae sit tibi gloria terris;
quae maneat caelis aspice, nupta Deo.
Munera laeta capis, festiuis fulgida taedis;
ecce uenit sponsus, munera laeta capis.
Et noua dulcisono modularis carmina plectro,
sponsa hymno exultas et noua dulcisono.
Nullus ab altithroni comitatu segregat Agni,

quam affectu tulerat nullus ab altithroni.

All-bounteous Three in One, Lord of all time,
Bless mine emprise, all-bounteous Three in One.
Battle be Maro's theme, sweet peace be mine;
Christ's gifts for me, battle be Maro's theme.
Chaste is my song, not wanton Helen's rape.
Leave lewdness to the lewd! Chaste is my song.
Divine the gifts I tell, not Troy's sad siege;
Source of earth's joys, divine the gifts I tell.
Eternal God comes down to Virgin's womb;
To set men free eternal God comes down.
From Virgin-mother springs (God's wicket-gate)
The Sire of all, from Virgin-mother springs.
Glad the bright virgin-choir to know God born
Of Virgin's womb, glad the bright virgin-choir.
Her glory made it grow, that holy plant;
Those virgin flowers, her glory made them grow.
In furnace fierce stood virgin Agatha,
Eulalia stands firm in furnace fierce.
Keen lions yield to Thecla's spirit high,
To chaste Euphemia keen lions yield.
Laughs at the sword (of finer temper she)
Agnes, and Cecily laughs at the sword.
Many the laurels won by holy hearts
O'er the wide world many the laurels won.
Nor lacks our age its ÆTHELTHRYTH as well;
Its virgin wonderful nor lacks our age.
Of royal blood she sprang, but nobler far.
God's service found than pride of royal blood.
Proud is she, queening it on earthly throne;
In heaven established far more proud is she.
Queen, wherefore seek a mate, with Christ thy groom?
To Him betrothed, queen, wherefore seek a mate?
Royal Mother of Heaven's King your leader now;
You too, maybe, a mother of Heaven's King.

She, pledged to God her spouse, twelve years had reigned,
When in the cloister was she pledged to God.
To heaven devoted, there she won new fame,
And breathed her last, to heaven devoted there.
Veiled in the tomb sixteen Novembers lay,
Nor rots her virgin flesh veiled in the tomb.
XT, Thine the power! even in the sepulchre
Her vesture spotless gleams. **XT**, Thine the power!
Yields to those holy weeds each frightful plague;
Disease aghast yields to those holy weeds.
Zeal frenzied tears the foe that conquered Eve;
Triumphs the saint, zeal frenzied tears the foe.
Affianced to the Lamb, now famed on earth!
Soon famed in heaven, affianced to the Lamb!
Many thy wedding gifts while torches blaze.
The Bridegroom comes; many thy wedding gifts
Ever on sweetest harp thou sing'st new songs.
Hymning thy Spouse ever on sweetest harp;
Ne'er parted from the Lamb's high company,
Whom earthly love ne'er parted from the Lamb.

HE IV.20, 396–401

9 The Kentish Queen as *Omnium Mater*: Goscelin of Saint-Bertin's Lections and the Emergence of the Cult of Saint Seaxburh

VIRGINIA BLANTON

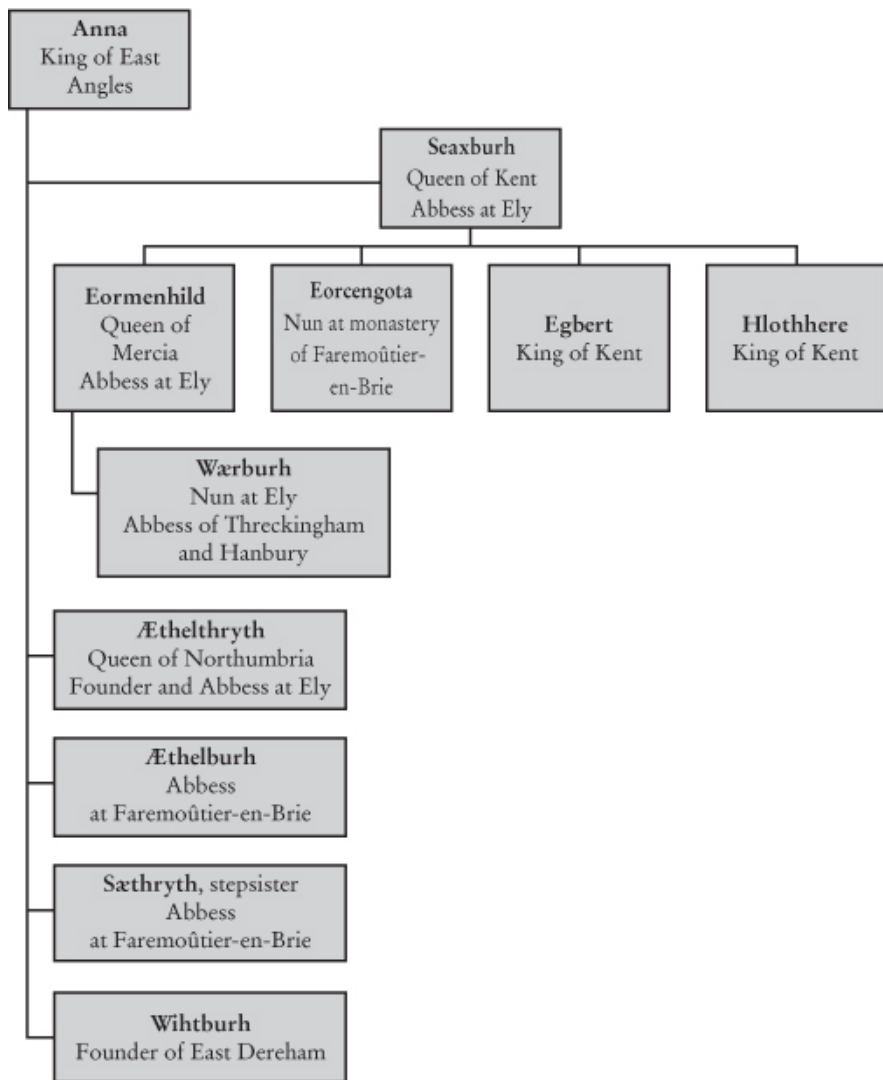
4. Quis autem digne memoret sacratissima Sexburga qualiter sub ipso iugo matrimonii uixerit? Duces nouerant dominam, pauperes alumnā, illi principem, isti frequentabant matrem, illi uenerabantur maiestatem, isti colebant humilitatem ... Palacium fecerat xenodochium, cubiculum, quantum ius maritale permittebat, habebat ut oratorium. Currebant ad aulam hinc caterue plebium et procerum, inde examina inopum et uaria clade afflictorum ... Porro ut omnium mater omnibus erat amabilis, omnibus uenerabilis, omnibus in necessitate condonabilis.

[4. But who can worthily describe how the most holy Seaxburh lived her life even under the yoke of matrimony? Ealdormen knew her as their mistress, the poor as a nurse, those visited her as a leader, these as a mother, those revered her grandeur, these adored her humility ... She made the palace a hospice, the bedroom – so far as marital rights permitted – she had as an oratory. From one direction hosts of people and princes flocked to the court, from the other crowds of the poor and those afflicted with various troubles ... Furthermore, as the mother of all she was loved by all and revered by all, readily devoted to all in need.]¹

Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, the celebrated hagiographer, visited Ely in c. 1087–8 to record the lives of the women saints venerated at the fenland monastery.² Surviving documents include lections in honour of Seaxburh and her daughter Eormenhild and the *vitae* of Wihtburh and Wærburh.³ The epigraph from Goscelin's presentation of Seaxburh identifies her as mistress, nurse, leader, and mother of all, or *omnium mater*. This portrait of the seventh-century Queen of Kent presents a new development in the cult tradition about Seaxburh, for in the eleventh century she began to be distinguished from her better-known sister Æthelthryth, the celebrated virgin who had founded a monastery at Ely in 673. As Bede notes in the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, which he completed in 731, Æthelthryth and Seaxburh were daughters of King Anna of the East Angles and they served as the first two abbesses of Ely.⁴ Two other sisters, Æthelburh and Sæthryth, and Seaxburh's daughter Eorcengota are also identified as nuns at the monastery of Faremoûtier-en-Brie in Gaul.⁵ According to Bede, then,

Anna, the first Christian king of the East Angles, had four daughters and one granddaughter. In the tenth century, three other women are included in this genealogy: Seaxburh's daughter and granddaughter, Eormenhild and Wærburh, and Anna's fifth daughter, Wihtburh (see [Figure 1](#)). The emergence of these three figures has led some to conclude that their identities were fabricated to enhance the status of Ely as a cult centre, and, as I have argued elsewhere, the cult of Wihtburh was developed to reinforce the claims of incorruption of Æthelthryth's body.⁶ This chapter aims to enhance these discussions and to illustrate how Goscelin's eleventh-century liturgy and *vitae* contributed to the recognition of Seaxburh as a figure of sanctity. His presentation suggests that a narrative about maternity was integral to the development of the hagiographical tradition at Ely. In a family of virgins whose corpses did not decay (Æthelthryth, Æthelburh, Eorcengota, Wihtburh, and Wærburh), Seaxburh, who had produced four children, remained the most overlooked of Anna's daughters.⁷ Goscelin's lections illustrate that Seaxburh's maternity was not a limitation to her sanctity but rather a direct contribution to it; in effect, he produces a narrative about this female-centred dynasty in which Seaxburh has a central role that fills a notable absence of any maternal figure in this family.

Figure 1. Women Saints



The founders of the East Anglian dynasty of saints were Anna and his unnamed queen. Unfortunately, Bede does not identify the mother of these saints, and despite the contention in the *Liber Eliensis* (a twelfth-century chronicle based on earlier accounts) that she was Hereswith, sister of Hild of Whitby, this seems to be unlikely. No other records indicate who this woman was, so we are left with the narrative as Bede offers it. He focuses on the relation of Æthelthryth and Seaxburh to the male figures in their lives, for they were royal princesses married to the kings of Kent and Northumbria. They were also queens who left their marital lands to return to their natal Cambridgeshire and rule Ely's monastery as its first two abbesses. The

narrative produced by Goscelin about Seaxburh, moreover, enhances that of the virginal Æthelthryth, whose cult was begun in the late seventh century and reinvigorated during the Benedictine Reforms of the tenth century. The presentation of Æthelthryth, a twice-married yet perpetual virgin who had renounced royal marriage for a life of monasticism, was augmented by the portrait of Seaxburh as the ideal royal mother, a queen who engenders sons who rule Kent well and daughters who serve its Church, all imitating their mother's public work for the kingdom and her selfless devotion to the growth of Christianity there. In effect, Goscelin chooses to distinguish Seaxburh as a typological maternal figure: a mother not only to her holy children but also to the people of Kent, a definition of queenship that accords with contemporary presentations of eleventh-century female consorts.⁸ The combination of leadership and nurture expressed in these lections, along with the assurance that her devotion leads others to love and revere her, allows Goscelin to identify Seaxburh as *omnium mater*. This nomenclature, combined with the specific role she takes on as queen, situates her as the motivating force behind the growth of Christianity in Kent. In presenting her as the founding mother of the Kentish dynasty, Goscelin also frames Seaxburh as the founding mother of Christian Kent. The following discussion, then, reviews the textual tradition about Seaxburh and examines Goscelin's presentation of her. This narrative, I argue, allowed the monks of Ely to present themselves as the caretakers of the monastic centre originally founded and governed by these royal women, and it allowed them to situate Ely as the locus of Christian conversion in Anglo-Saxon England. That is, the monks of Ely intimate that Kent becomes and remains Christian because Seaxburh, a representative of the East Anglian royal house, marries its king and produces a dynasty that embraces and supports Christianity in Kent and later in Mercia. The Ely community maintained that, once East Anglia was converted under Anna, it remained so. This claim – along with the genealogical narrative of Anna's saintly daughters – allowed the monastic community to present itself at the origins of Christian England and to suggest that it was the Seaxburh's contributions to Kent that shaped its future as the seat of Christian conversion.

Before Goscelin

Early devotion to the virgin saints Æthelthryth and Wihtburh has received scholarly attention, but the cult of Seaxburh remains virtually unexplored, in no small part because little was written about her before the tenth century.⁹ Seaxburh, who married King Eorcenberht of Kent,

was the eldest daughter of Anna and the only one known to produce children.¹⁰ While Bede records the reigns of Seaxburh's sons, Egbert and Hlothhere, who ruled in turn after their father, and while he offers a brief account regarding the sanctity of her daughter, Eorcengota, there are few details about Seaxburh herself.¹¹ Bede mentions that Seaxburh governed Ely as its second abbess and that she supervised the translation of Æthelthryth's corpse and found it uncorrupted. Additional notices about Seaxburh appear in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Kentish Royal Legend*, where she is identified as founder of a monastery and regent for her son, as well as being named the mother of kings and holy women.¹² The following overview highlights the presentation of Seaxburh in these documents to illustrate how the queen was presented before Goscelin wrote his lections.

In manuscripts E and F of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (hereafter *ASC*), details about Seaxburh's status as daughter of King Anna and about her own daughter Eorcengota are recorded:

AN.dcxix. Her Eadbald Cantwara cining forðferde, se wæs cining .xxiiii. wintra. Ða feng his sunu Ercenbriht to þam rice, se towearp ealla þa deofelgyld on his rice, 7 ærost Englisca cininga he gesette Eastorfeasten; þæs dohter wæs gehaten Ercongota, halifemne 7 wundorlic man, þære modor wæs Sexburh Annan dohter Eastengla ciningas.

[In this year Eadbald, king of Kent, passed away; he had been king twenty-four years. Then his son Eorcenberht succeeded to the kingdom; he put down all heathen practices in his realm, and was the first of the English kings to enforce the observance of Lent. His daughter was called Eorcengota, a holy virgin and a remarkable person, whose mother was Seaxburh, daughter of Anna, king of the East Anglians.]¹³

This short passage outlines Seaxburh's position as wife of Eorcenberht, mother to Eorcengota, and daughter of Anna and thus provides the most significant genealogical details about this princess and queen. A comparison of the surviving manuscripts of the *ASC*, however, shows that the entry about Seaxburh and her family was included only in versions produced in the eleventh century; it does not appear in A, the oldest surviving manuscript (CCCC, MS 173), parts of which have been dated to the late ninth century.¹⁴ This difference suggests that the entry about Seaxburh in E and F was an emendation, added perhaps as Seaxburh's cult was being developed after the refoundation of Ely in the late tenth century. Such a rewriting of history was not uncommon as monastic communities in England began to actively promote their local saints in the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁵ The information

included in the *ASC*, however, does not amplify the information provided by Bede, a near-contemporary of the Kentish queen.

In the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* (hereafter *HE*), Bede mentions Seaxburh three times, but in each, she is tangential to his larger purpose. In the first reference, Eorcenberht's ascension to the Kentish throne is described, as well as his service to the Church, which includes his ordering the worship of false idols to be abandoned and the images destroyed; instituting a fast to be observed before Lent; and levelling punishments for offenders against these requirements.¹⁶ (The exact correlation between this list and the passage in the *ASC* strongly indicates that Bede was the source for this description of the king's activities.) As Bede recounts Eorcenberht's legislation on the Church's behalf, he includes an account of the king's daughter Eorcengota:

ut condigna parenti suboles, magnarum fuit uirgo uirtutum, seruiens Domino in monasterio quod in regione Francorum constructum est ab abbatissa nobilissima uocabulo Fara in loco qui dicitur In [sic] Brige.

[a child worthy of her parent, was a most virtuous maiden who served the Lord in a monastery founded in the land of the Franks by a noble abbess named Fara in a place called Brie].¹⁷

The special relationship between daughter and father is emphasized here. Explicitly, Eorcengota is the child worthy of her father (not of her parents, plural). Seaxburh has yet to be named or identified as Eorcengota's mother. It is only after this claim that Bede inserts a comment about the Anglo-Saxon women who became nuns in Gaul, such as Sæthryth and Æthelburh, Anna's other daughters. Following this point, Bede says, "Cuius regis filia maior Sexburg, uxor Earconbercti regis Cantuariorum, habuit filiam Earcongotam, de qua sumus dicturi" [Of which king, the eldest daughter Seaxburh, wife of King Eorcenberht of Kent, had a daughter Eorcengota, about whom we are about to speak].¹⁸ Following this identification, Bede proceeds to recount the story of Eorcengota's miraculous death and the discovery of her fresh corpse after three days entombed. The sole reference to Seaxburh in the narrative appears, then, because Bede is linking Eorcengota to the East Anglian women religious. In this passage, Seaxburh is daughter, wife, and mother; she is the connection between the East Anglian holy women and the saintly daughter of the Kentish royal family. We learn no details about Seaxburh's religious choices, and Bede does not praise the queen for religious conviction or spiritual behaviour, as he does Eorcenberht and Eorcengota. Seaxburh is a holy woman's mother, as well as wife to a king who supported Christian

conversion, but most significantly, she is the daughter of the Christian King Anna and sister to Ely's saints. In subsequent references, moreover, Bede mentions Seaxburh only in relation to her sister Æthelthryth, who is celebrated in Book IV of his history.¹⁹

When Bede recounts the story of Æthelthryth's death, interment, and subsequent reburial, he says, "Cui successit in ministerium abbatissae soror eius Sexburg, quam habuerat in coniugem Earconberct rex Cantuariorum" [The sister of this one, Seaxburh, who had been the wife of Eorcenberht, king of Kent, succeeded her in the in the office of abbess].²⁰ In this second reference to Seaxburh, Bede reminds his reader of her natal and marital bonds before recounting how she finds Æthelthryth's preserved corpse. In retelling the translation ceremony, he affords complete agency to Seaxburh for this discovery: she decides to translate the body; she orders the brothers to look for a stone sarcophagus; she enters the tent and finds the corpse intact; she praises God for the miraculous preservation.²¹ Even the physician's first-person account emphasizes Seaxburh's authority over this event. This passage, therefore, provides the most significant description of Seaxburh's religious action. Unfortunately, nothing more is offered about Seaxburh's own spiritual convictions, about her choice to become a nun, or about her decision to succeed her sister as abbess.

Bede's third reference to Seaxburh does not name her directly, but again, she is identified by her sororal position: in recounting the miracle of Imma and his loosened bonds, Bede indicates that Imma begs ransom from King Hlothhere of Kent, "qui erat filius sororis Aedilthrydae reginae, de qua supra dictum est" [who was the son of the sister of Queen Æthelthryth, about whom it was spoken above].²² In Bede's three references to Seaxburh, then, he focuses on the queen's place in the family, not on her religious devotion or contributions to the Church. The lack of supporting details about her religious life suggests that, at the time Bede completed his history, Seaxburh was not venerated as a saint, nor did she have a significant role in the Kentish Church.

A legendary about the royal family of Kent offers a significantly different view of this queen and mother. The *Mildrith Legend*, which includes a genealogical overview of the Kentish royal tradition, appears in several versions, one of which was likely based on an eighth-century source.²³ Extant manuscripts, however, date to the tenth and eleventh centuries, a fact that indicates that the *Mildrith Legend*, which provides some detail about the emergence of Seaxburh's cult in the later Anglo-Saxon or early Norman period, is as problematic a text as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for gleaning details about Seaxburh's life. Still, one

version in particular demonstrates how the queen began to be presented as a saint. The *Kentish Royal Legend* (hereafter *KRL*), a version of the *Mildrith Legend* written in Old English, provides multiple entries about Seaxburh. Like Bede's account, it focuses particularly on Seaxburh's natal and marital families: "Ðonne wæs Ecgbriht cyninge and Loðhere cyninge and sancta Eormenhild and sancta Ercengota – wæron Ercenbrihtes bearn and Sexburge, his cwene" [Then Egbert was king and Hlothhere after him and there was Saint Eormenhild and Saint Eorcengota – who were the children of Eorcenberht and his queen, Seaxburh].²⁴ This is the first instance in which there is a clear association made between Seaxburh and Egbert, whom Bede calls Eorcenberht's son and Hlothhere's brother, but not Seaxburh's son.²⁵

A more intriguing passage about Seaxburh follows, in which Seaxburh is credited with founding Minster-in-Sheppey on land donated by her son Hlothhere:

Donne wæs Sexburh Cantwarena cwen; heo gestaðelode sancta Marian mynster on Sceapege and þa Godes þeowas þarto gesette: hwæt, þa Loðhere cyninge, hyre sunu, heom þare landare geuþe, þe hig git big libbað and heo þa gebedrædene þar arærdon. Ðonne wæs sancte Sexburh and sancta Æþeldryð and sancta Wihtburh Annan dohtra Eastengla cyninges.

[Then Seaxburh was Queen of Kent; she established the minster of Holy Mary in Sheppey and set there the servants of God; truly her son King Hlothhere gave the land there to them, the place on which it yet exists; and she built it up there with prayer. Then Saint Seaxburh, and Saint Æthelthryth and Saint Wihtburh were daughters of Anna, king of the East Angles.]²⁶

Here, the presentation of Seaxburh as founder of a monastery is tied directly to her sisters' holiness. The writer of the *KRL* most likely knew the tradition that both Æthelthryth and Wihtburh were founders of monastic houses, and, while their patronage is left unstated, the connection between the three Ely sisters is made manifest by Seaxburh's foundation at Sheppey and by the title of sanctity afforded all three women. The *KRL*, therefore, is the first of the historical documents examined here to identify Seaxburh's sanctity; it is significant that this presentation occurs just after Seaxburh's feast began to be included in tenth-century calendars.²⁷

The *KRL* shows an interest not only in Seaxburh's sanctity but also in her production of her holy daughters and granddaughter. The third passage in the *KRL* returns to a description of Seaxburh's progeny, for it describes the marriage of Seaxburh's daughter, Eormenhild, to

Wulfhere of Mercia (“Donne wæs sancta Eormenhild, Ercenbrihtes dohtor and Sexburge, forgifen Wulfhere cyninge to cwene”), as well as the birth of Seaxburh’s granddaughter, Wærburh (“And ðar hi begeaton sancta Wærburge, þa halgan fæmnan”). The account also indicates that the body of Eormenhild rests at Ely next to her mother’s and her aunt’s bodies (“Donne resteð sancte Eormenhild on Eligabirig mid hyre medder and mid hyre moddrian sancte Æþeldryðe”).²⁸ The passage concludes by recounting Eorcengota’s religious life at Faremoûtier-en-Brie. Like the *ASC* and Bede’s *HE*, therefore, the *KRL* demonstrates how Seaxburh figures in the East Anglian and Kentish genealogies, but it does more: it shows how Seaxburh’s production of female saints situated her as a patron and a saint. Her story, moreover, is akin to the generation of the Kentish dynasty of female saints provided by the *KRL*.²⁹ Thus, it appears that the details about Seaxburh as a saint began with the *KRL* (no doubt because Seaxburh figured as an extension of the Kentish royal family), but the amplifications therein are only slightly enlarged from Bede’s narrative. The much more developed story provided by Goscelin, therefore, is suggestive about the timing and production of Seaxburh’s cult, especially as it appears to have been generated at Ely, not in Kent, where the *KRL* was produced.

Goscelin’s *Lectiones in festiuitate S. Sexburge*

Goscelin’s eight lections for the feast of Seaxburh constitute a birth-to-death narrative that offers significantly more information about the life of Anna’s eldest daughter than exists in previous records.³⁰ The lections include: (1) a prologue of praise, (2) a description of Seaxburh’s childhood and marriage to Eorcenberht, (3) an explanation of their marriage as divinely ordained, (4) a testament about Kent’s adoration of their queen, (5) a review of her religious service, especially her encouragement of Eorcenberht’s support of the church, (6) an account of the spiritual instruction of her children and her community, (7) a description of her widowhood and subsequent vocation as a nun, and (8) the story of her election as abbess of Ely, followed by her death and burial.³¹ Drawing upon the conventions of hagiography, Goscelin adopts a number of common tropes, such as Seaxburh’s exceptional virtue in childhood, her resistance to marriage, her desire for a religious vocation, her exceptional spiritual devotion, her widowhood spent in a monastery, and the healing miracles she performs post-mortem. These regular features of a saint’s life set up a familiar narrative, but Seaxburh’s connection to Ely and the importance of her place in the East Anglian royal family become special features of her sanctity.

As noted above, it was Bede who highlighted Eorcenberht's spiritual devotion and contributions to the Kentish Church, despite his father Eadbald's failure to support the Christian tradition his grandfather Æthelberht had established.³² Goscelin recasts this idea by indicating that among the many suitors who pursue Seaxburh, only Eorcenberht is worthy of her, and she is given to the Kentish king because he is "*filio Eadbaldi filii Æthelbrihti summi ac primi ex Anglis regibus christiani*" [son of Eadbald son of Æthelberht, foremost and first Christian of the English kings].³³ Just as Seaxburh's upbringing under "the most Christian King Anna" [sub christianissimo rege patre Anna] is emphasized, so too is Eorcenberht's (lec. 2, p. 2). Linking Eorcenberht to Æthelberht allows Goscelin to illustrate Eorcenberht's worthiness as a husband, that his relation to the first Christian king of Kent, is what makes Eorcenberht an acceptable spouse. Goscelin stresses, therefore, the importance of dynastic kingship and the continued support of the faith from grandfather to grandson. This presentation is offered to supplement the focus on Seaxburh's East Anglian lineage and to make intelligible the claim that Seaxburh weds Eorcenberht because "*reniti non poterat ... maxime autem diuine dispositioni que in ea preuidit genus electum, et subsidia multorum*" [she could not resist ... the divine ordinance which foresaw in her a chosen race, and the help of many] (lec. 3, pp. 2-3). While it is a topos of hagiographic writing that a young girl be forced to marry against her wishes, this explanation allows Goscelin to illustrate how divine law shapes England's religious future: the union of a daughter of Christian East Anglians and a grandson of the first Christian king in England will produce children who will be faithful servants of Christ. While Goscelin does remind his audience that Christianity came first to Kent (not to East Anglia), he presents his story in such a way that it is Eorcenberht who must be worthy of Seaxburh, not the reverse. In effect, Goscelin raises Seaxburh's status and suggests that the East Anglian tradition of holiness is as important as the Kentish tradition, even if Ely cannot claim to be the original site of England's Christian conversion.

The presentation of Anna's daughter as an heir to an established Christian tradition is subtle compared with Goscelin's description of Seaxburh's final days as a widow among her East Anglian family. Goscelin says that "*beata Sexburga post longa suspiria liberrimo Christi seruitio dimissa, Eligense monasterium acsi paradysum Dei subiit*" [blessed Seaxburh, after long sighs, was released into that service of greatest freedom, the service of Christ, and entered the monastery at Ely as if it were God's paradise] (lec. 7, pp. 6-7). Ely is framed here as a refuge from the world, one where Seaxburh can finally focus on her lifelong desire of a spiritual vocation. The return to Ely allows the

queen to fulfil this desire, and her family makes it possible. Living alongside her sister, Seaxburh is a second Æthelthryth; Goscelin describes the penance and ascetic practices that allow Seaxburh “omnique continentia et humilitate emulari sanctimoniam castissime sororis Ætheldrithe” [to emulate the sanctity of her most chaste sister Æthelthryth] (lec. 7, pp. 6–7). After Æthelthryth’s death, the nuns elect Seaxburh abbess, where she once again emulates her sister’s life as their leader. Her work is exceptional, for as the poet claims, Seaxburh completed her life at Ely “in sanctitate perfecta” [in perfect sanctity] (lec. 8, pp. 8–9), a statement that indicates how successfully Seaxburh has modelled her life on her sister’s. Seaxburh’s reward in death, moreover, is a place of honour: she lies between Æthelthryth and Eormenhild, “consorti tumba et caritate infinita” [in a shared tomb and in infinite love] (lec. 8, pp. 8–9) and she performs miracles for those who ask it of her. Seaxburh’s sanctity is confirmed by her burial site, and the imagery of a shared tomb illustrates the level of spiritual perfection she has achieved, despite having married and produced children. The placement of Seaxburh between her virginal sister and her widowed daughter is also curious. It is not in keeping with the descriptions of tomb placements at Ely, and one wonders if Goscelin is recounting what he saw at Ely or if he is suggesting that Seaxburh’s position as queen and mother links Æthelthryth, the spiritual mother of Ely, to her niece Eormenhild, the biological mother of Wærburh.³⁴ In any case, Goscelin makes it quite clear that Seaxburh is worthy of a place alongside Æthelthryth, the founder and virgin saint of Ely, even as he intimates by the clustering of their tombs that the sororal family is the locus of spiritual strength in East Anglia and that Seaxburh’s maternity has a central place in this narrative.

The East Anglian royals receive Goscelin’s attention from the outset, for in his opening lection of praise, he repeatedly underscores Seaxburh’s place in Anna’s family, using appositives to identify her as his daughter and as mother to saints: “regum proles et regum parens, immo sanctorum genitrix, regina sanctissima Sexburga, digne in terris celebratur laude festiua” [progeny of kings, parent of kings, indeed, bearer of saints, the most holy queen Seaxburh is worthily celebrated on earth with festive praise].³⁵ The intertwining of procreative and royal imagery situates Seaxburh as royal daughter, royal mother, holy queen, and, most significantly, holy mother. In fact, as Janet L. Nelson has noted, drawing upon the work of Marcelle Thiébaux, *genetrix* “is a significant choice of word, being a fairly rare feminine form of *genitor*, ‘engenderer’ or ‘bringer forth,’ rather than *mater*, which Isidore of Seville explained etymologically was derived from *materia*, ‘matter’ ... so called because from her something is made ... while the *genitor* is the

cause.”³⁶ In this presentation, Seaxburh is the “bringer forth of saints,” the cause of these saints. Seaxburh, therefore, is the nexus between the royal, the sacred, and the dynastic. King Anna may be celebrated because he has produced so many virginal daughters who become saints, but it is Seaxburh’s role as mother that makes the dynasty possible: she is to bear “genus electum” [a chosen race]. Goscelin’s presentation situates Seaxburh as a latter-day Sarah, the mother of the tribes of Israel; the Queen of Kent is to produce the royal sons and daughters who will continue the Christian tradition established by their paternal great-grandfather Æthelberht and maintained by their maternal grandfather, Anna. Therefore, Seaxburh is “sanctorum genitrix” when she bears Egbert and Hlothhere, sons “beloved of God,” and Eorcengota and Eormenhild, holy daughters. She is also grandmother to Wærburh, who is described as “Christ’s brilliant jewel.”³⁷ Of note, it is Seaxburh’s sanctity, not Eorcenberht’s, that makes her children and grandchildren exceptional. And therein lies the difference between the Kentish and East Anglian traditions: Anna can boast of his holy daughters and granddaughters, whereas Eorcenberht and his father were never described as saints. Likewise, his sons Egbert and Hlothhere are good kings, not holy men. Thus, the East Anglian tradition indicates that men may become Christian kings, but the royal women of the family become saints; in this Ely’s legendary competes successfully with the presentation of the holy women in the *Kentish Royal Legend*, where Kent’s female saints are so highly celebrated.³⁸

The emphasis on maternity in these lections stresses the sororal as well, even as Goscelin’s presentation of Seaxburh’s royalty and her position as Queen of Kent illustrates how the maternal operates as the lynchpin between these various people. In effect, Goscelin frames Seaxburh in ways that recall the expectations of eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon queens. Pauline Stafford has discussed the liturgical materials associated with queenship and considered them against the lives of historical women. She demonstrates that English consecration rituals emphasized the queen’s partnership with the king in his public responsibilities, which included protecting the people and sharing in his obligations to the church: shunning heresies, bringing people to Christianity, and helping them to understand the true faith. In addition, the queen’s office was to support the king’s rule and to be “a consecrated wife and mother.”³⁹ Stafford also shows how this role developed over the tenth and eleventh centuries, explaining that around Queen Emma’s time, the rite included benedictions that invoke the queen’s “role as Queen of the English people, and refer to her as the glory of the Anglo-Saxons.”⁴⁰ These details accord with Goscelin’s presentation of Seaxburh, especially when he illustrates how she

exercised power as queen. Goscelin praises her for managing material wealth and remaining steadfast in the temporal world of responsibilities and pleasures: “Vt uera imperatrix diuitiis imperabat, nec his quas tenebat teneri poterat” [Like a true mistress she mastered wealth, and could not be controlled by the things she controlled] (lec. 1, pp. 2–3). Goscelin indicates that this behaviour is appropriate for a sovereign by calling her a “true mistress”: Seaxburh upholds her duties but does not relish them, and she remains impervious to the lure of temporal rank. Seaxburh is, therefore, the one “que contempta mundiali potentia, celesti fulget excellentia” [who, having scorned worldly power, shines with heavenly excellence] (lec. 1, pp. 2–3). This passage hints at the queen’s future religious vocation, in which she forfeits the comfort of her royal position for a monastic home. While this future is always in the background of his presentation, Goscelin demonstrates that Seaxburh fulfils her secular obligations as queen, precisely according to the terms Stafford discusses.

The principal means by which Seaxburh maintains her role as queen is in the production of children or, in Goscelin’s terms, in the production of a dynasty of Christian children. Children notwithstanding, Goscelin also considers the other ways in which Seaxburh’s role as queen matters, setting up the discussion: “Quis autem digne memoret sacratissima Sexburga qualiter sub ipso iugo matrimonii uixerit?” [But who can worthily describe how the most holy Seaxburh lived her life even under the yoke of matrimony?] (lec. 4, pp. 4–5). With this question, Goscelin establishes a place in the narrative for religious action apart from the generation of children, yet even here, the maternal is invoked. He says in lection 4 (which is quoted in the epigraph) that Seaxburh is simultaneously mistress and nurse, leader and mother; she is revered and adored, imperious and humble. Furthermore, Goscelin describes how Seaxburh uses royal space for charitable or spiritual purposes when she makes her palace a hospice and her bedroom an oratory. He claims that Seaxburh’s piety and pity drew crowds of people, rich and poor, to her door. For these reasons, Goscelin names her *omnium mater* and tells us she “omnibus erat amabilis, omnibus uenerabilis, omnibus in necessitate condonabilis” [was loved by all and revered by all, readily devoted to all in need] (lec. 4, pp. 4–5). The implication of this passage is that Seaxburh marshals her many resources as queen and turns them to a spiritual purpose; her role as queen, which here means “mother of all,” allows her to effect spiritual devotion in others: “Proficiebat ipsius instantia fides in populo, in ecclesiis religio, in sacerdotibus sanctitudo” [By her determination faith increased in the people, religion in the churches, holiness in the priests] (lec. 6, pp. 6–7). Significantly, Seaxburh uses

her position to enact corporal acts of mercy for the poor and spiritual acts of mercy for the rich, behaviour that demonstrates how she nurtures her people. This description is a direct echo of the opening lection in which she is described as negotiating the responsibilities of rule even as she remained a devoted servant of God. Thus, Goscelin succeeds in drawing a portrait of Seaxburh ministering to the needs of others: as a queen, who is both mother and protector, she takes care of the kingdom's practical and spiritual needs, and she leads them to Christianity.

Seaxburh's influence on others is extended explicitly to her husband, whose religious devotion she influences. In the fifth lection, Seaxburh leverages her power as queen to effect religious change throughout the kingdom:

Regem uero maritum insignis uirago attentius accendebat ad diuinum obsequium. Nam si iuxta apostoli uocem saluatur uir infidelis per mulierem fidelem, quanto magis mutua fides utriusque fidelis augebit salutem. Rex itaque crebro ipsius instinctu, primo omnia idola que sub prioribus regibus adhuc erant residua, ab uniuerso regno suo cum omni paganismo funditus exterminauit, regnumque Christi apud se iam non tam dilatauit, quam totum Christi esse fecit. Nec minus cum intentissima regina multiplicauit ecclesias amplificauit monasteria. Primus etiam quadragesimalis abstinentie ita omnibus indixit obseruantiam, ut uiolatoribus decerneret uindictam. His suis sancteque cooperatricis Sexburge meritis, principatum longe optinuit ampliorem predecessoribus suis, salua eternaliter mercede in celis.

[But the excellent heroine more intently incited her husband the king to obedience to God. For if according to the apostle's dictum an unbelieving husband is saved by a believing wife, how much the more will shared belief increase the salvation of both believers. And so the king at her frequent prompting first exterminated completely from his whole kingdom all the idols which had still lingered under previous kings, along with all paganism, and now not just spread the kingdom of Christ in his realm, but made it totally Christ's. Together with his most zealous queen, moreover, he multiplied the churches, enriched the monasteries. Also he was the first to command the observance of lenten fasting by all, such that he decreed a punishment for violators. By these his own merits and those of his holy co-worker Seaxburh, he obtained a reign far wider than his predecessors, save for the eternal reward in heaven.] (lec. 5, pp. 4-7)

Clearly drawn from Bede's description of Eorcenberht's commitment to the Christianization of Kent, this passage changes the earlier narrative by presenting Seaxburh as the catalyzing agent in the developing

Kentish Church, even as it illustrates that previous kings had not been able to do so. Goscelin affirms Seaxburh's participation by quoting the passage from 1 Corinthians 7:14 about the wife who brings her husband to belief, indicating Seaxburh has encouraged Eorcenberht's spiritual obedience. As a result, Seaxburh and Eorcenberht are a Christian team, sharing the same goals and work, which, as the poet indicates, will bring them an even greater heavenly reward. Still, it is Seaxburh who is afforded the praise for leading her husband; it is her behaviour as queen that provides the model for royal action. Indeed, in a previous lection Goscelin affirms that Seaxburh is responsible for "regni negotia" [the business of the kingdom] (lec. 4, pp. 4–5), which she completes before she spends time in church. In other words, the queen exercises her secular duties before focusing on her own private devotion. But Goscelin also makes it clear that Seaxburh has combined her vocational desire and her temporal role: she turns all of her queenly duties to religious and charitable ends. Seaxburh's role as an adviser to her husband, as well as his queen, therefore, allows her to effect religious change, even as it positions her to demonstrate the proper approach in ruling.

Goscelin concludes his presentation of Seaxburh's maternity and queenship in the final lection, which details her election to the office of abbess after Æthelthryth's death. As was true of the male religious who blessed her, the nuns recognize Seaxburh's leadership and insist that she become the head of the monastery. Goscelin elaborates considerably on Bede, providing a hint of Seaxburh's mindset when he indicates that she reluctantly took up these duties, for it meant that she could not live as a solitary but was "tot animarum fore tributaria" [the tributary of so many souls] (lec.8, pp. 8–9). Divine ordinance had decreed that Seaxburh would be needed by others, and once again she keeps vigilant watch over the nuns, ruling and ministering to all as the mother of the house. Goscelin writes "*se dominice familie potius fieri meruisse dispensatricem quam si sub rege suo ut pridem uideret se prouinciarum et urbium principem*" [that she had deserved to be the steward of the Lord's family rather than the ruler of provinces and cities as she had previously found herself under her king] (lec. 8, pp. 8–9). This passage echoes the opening wherein Goscelin praises Seaxburh for forsaking her temporal rank, even as it emphasizes her service to her community as the first step in her religious vocation. In other words, Seaxburh has simply been in training for the life she is now taking up, the time when her sanctity could be proved by her devotion to a religious life.

Replacing Bertha

Goscelin's lections provide the first evidence of an effort to highlight Seaxburh's role as the Kentish matriarch, indeed the mother of Christianity in Kent. The portrait of Seaxburh as nurturer, as the one who endows not only her biological children with faith but also the "children" that she governs, allows Goscelin to confirm her as *omnium mater*. This title, however, might be better attributed to Bertha, the Merovingian princess whose marriage to Æthelberht was contingent on her being allowed to continue her religious practice as a Christian.⁴¹ Many have speculated about the impact Bertha may have had on her husband, who converted to Christianity after their marriage.⁴² If we return to Bede, we learn that after her marriage Bertha was given a church and that her priest Liudhard assisted her, but Bede makes no direct link between Bertha and Æthelberht's conversion. In fact, he attributes Æthelberht's baptism to Augustine and his followers.⁴³ Stacy Klein has persuasively argued that Bede presents the case as he does to understate the impact of the Franks on the Kentish court and to emphasize the unity of England as direct heirs of Christian Rome.⁴⁴ Klein illustrates that Bede, who records a number of papal letters in his history, does not include a letter written by Pope Gregory to Bertha after Æthelberht's conversion; in it the pope chastises the queen for not having converted her husband long before.⁴⁵ It is Bede's framework, perhaps, that prevented Bertha from receiving recognition as the founding mother of Christian England. His presentation of her devotion remains individual, and his contempt for her son, Eadbald, was extreme, as noted above. It is Eadbald's son, Eorcenberht, whom Bede celebrates for his religious devotion and who is responsible for the abandonment of idols and the institution of the Lenten fast.⁴⁶ In this, Bede shows how Eorcenberht inherits his grandfather's mission. But, as we have seen, Bede does not elaborate on Seaxburh's service as queen or her contribution beyond the birthing of Eorcengota. It is Goscelin who presents Seaxburh as the agent through whom Kent is fully Christianized.

The source of Goscelin's presentation of Seaxburh as *omnium mater* remains unclear. It certainly did not come from Bede, for Goscelin's lections for Seaxburh show very little reliance on his history.⁴⁷ Nor does he seem to rely on the *Kentish Royal Legend* or the *Mildrith Legend*. While Goscelin broaches the subject of Seaxburh's abilities as queen, he does not include the tradition that, after Eorcenberht's death, she reigned for thirty years as regent for her son Hlothhere.⁴⁸ This claim is recorded in what is known as the *Lambeth Fragment*, a version of the *Mildrith Legend* that describes Seaxburh as building the minster at Sheppey during the years she served as regent.⁴⁹ One wonders if Goscelin was even aware of this tradition. Elisabeth Van Houts

contends that Goscelin went directly to Canterbury and then visited the fenland abbeys.⁵⁰ The presentation of Seaxburh seems to suggest, however, that Goscelin was at Ely first and moved to Canterbury after. If he had been established at Canterbury before his visit to Ely, would he not have been more influenced by Kentish tradition, as presented in the *KRL* and the *Mildrith Legend*? Would he have presented Seaxburh as the “founding mother” of Christianity in his new home of Kent? Would Canterbury have approved such an attribution? It seems doubtful, especially given the predominance of the Kentish legendary tradition. More likely, Goscelin first went to Ely as an itinerant hagiographer, where he drew upon Bede and the community’s traditions about Seaxburh to write lections for her feast, and later moved to Canterbury.

Other than Bede, no evidence exists for the text(s) Goscelin may have used to write the lections. Something is known about his practice, however. Barbara Yorke has shown that on the whole, Goscelin may embellish a source, but he does not invent factual details.⁵¹ His pattern in producing other hagiographical work indicates that, as he drew upon Ely’s written tradition, he would have given them his personal touch but not made them up out of whole cloth. Considering this tendency, it is most probable that Goscelin was working from an Ely document. His lections for Seaxburh, then, can be understood as authorized by the community at Ely (even as their survival in Ely records indicates the monastery’s approval of them). The differences between what I am calling Ely’s presentation of Seaxburh (the lections) and that included in the Kentish tradition are suggestive. Where the *KRL* assigns Seaxburh a place in the family of Kentish women saints and presents her as founder of an important minster in Kent, the tradition at Ely affords Seaxburh the role as Kent’s *omnium mater*. The presentation of this maternal image suggests that Ely had a significant interest in situating an East Anglian princess as the progenitor of a family of saints and as a saint herself; the community also seems to have been invested in presenting the final religious conversion of Kent as accomplished in no small part because of Seaxburh’s role as queen. Ely may not have known the *KRL* or may well have been aware of the Kentish tradition and chose to ignore it. The stakes would have been high, at least from Ely’s perspective: in presenting Seaxburh as the catalyzing agent of Christian development in Kent, the community at Ely could redirect the narrative of Christian conversion and centre East Anglia as a locus of holiness. In eliminating the queen’s regency as widow, moreover, Ely could focus on Seaxburh’s devotion to a spiritual life and set her up as a second Æthelthryth; by not acknowledging her foundation at Sheppey, the community could further focus their attention on Seaxburh’s support of their own house. In effect, Goscelin’s presentation shows

that once Seaxburh's role as queen was ended, she immediately returned to her natal family and built a monastic life at Ely. Redirecting the attention from Kent to East Anglia works to reaffirm Ely's ancient past, to allow the community to claim that once it was converted under Anna, East Anglia (unlike Kent) had not wavered in its devotion to Christ, and it also allowed the monks to emphasize the sanctity of Anna's daughters, the women who proved to be the physical embodiment of East Anglia's long-lasting service to the Church. In this self-presentation, therefore, the community at Ely becomes the locus of Christian England, the place from whence royal daughters go out to evangelize – Æthelthryth to Northumbria, Seaxburh to Kent, and Eorcengota to Mercia, as Goscelin's lections for her feast claim – and the place to which they return to govern as its abbesses.⁵²

Appendix: Goscelin's *Lectiones in festiuitate S. Sexburge*

The following outlines the eight lections for Seaxburh's feast that Goscelin wrote for Ely:

- 1 The prologue praises Seaxburh's abdication of her rank as queen, after identifying the virtues that earn her a place in heaven: continence and humility.
- 2 Seaxburh is born to King Anna and his queen. As a child, she develops a reputation for her good character, grace, and modesty, which leads many royal and well-born men to seek her hand in marriage. She is given only to Eorcenberht, who is the direct descendant of Æthelberht, *summi ac primi ex Anglis regibus christiani*.
- 3 Her parents thwart Seaxburh's desire for the monastery, forcing her to marry. This situation is soothed by the reassurance that divine ordinance demands that she produce a dynasty. Her two sons and two daughters, as well as her granddaughter, are named and identified as Christ's children.
- 4 As queen, Seaxburh uses the palace as a place of refuge for all. She is identified as *omnium mater* and as *monacha* for her Christian service to the people of Kent.
- 5 Seaxburh encourages Eorcenberht's spiritual life and convinces him to eradicate paganism in Kent. Together they build churches and enrich monasteries. Seaxburh is Eorcenberht's *cooperatricis*.
- 6 Seaxburh spiritually instructs her children and her community. Her work is coordinated with that of Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, and Hadrian, the abbot, who encourage her patience with her temporal work as she awaits the opportunity to begin a

spiritual life.

- 7 Eorcenberht dies, and Seaxburh enters the monastery at Ely, casting aside her royal robes for the most humble ones. Her ascetic practices include fastings, vigils, and hard work, which are intended to purge her lust and her sexual experiences. In continence and humility, she attempts to emulate Æthelthryth's chastity.
- 8 Seaxburh succeeds Æthelthryth as abbess, at the nuns' request. Her leadership is a direct result of her stewardship as queen. While abbess, Seaxburh discovers the incorruptibility of Æthelthryth's body. After her death, Seaxburh is buried with Æthelthryth and her daughter Eormenhild. Those who pray at her tomb receive healing, which is evidence of her status in heaven.

Virgin Martyrs

10 Agnes among the Anglo-Saxons: Patristic Influences in Anglo-Latin and Anglo-Saxon Versions of the *Passio* of St Agnes, Virgin and Martyr

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The cult of Agnes first rose to prominence in Rome during the fourth century, a period in which monasticism gained its first solid footholds in continental western Europe. During this time, Ambrose of Milan published the earliest known record of St Agnes as part of his influential work, *De uirginibus*. Agnes's cult endured in continental monasticism and appears to have prospered similarly in Anglo-Saxon England as monastic Christianity established itself in the wake of conversion on the island. As E. Gordon Whatley points out, however, "there is as yet no comprehensive treatment of the Anglo-Saxons' ... reception and adaptation of the early Christian and early medieval hagiographic traditions, both Western and Eastern, by which their own narrative compositions were undoubtedly influenced."¹ Instead of comprehensive treatment, I wish to focus specifically upon the tradition surrounding the martyrdom of St Agnes and its reception and adaptation by Anglo-Saxon writers, because, as Whatley also observes, "Agnes's place in Anglo-Saxon culture has not been the subject of special study."² Well known as Ambrose's *De uirginibus* was on the Continent, it seems to have been unknown in Anglo-Saxon England, despite the rapid growth of monastic devotion and learning that followed the Irish and Roman missions. In its place, a work credited to Ambrose by the Anglo-Saxons but now attributed to Pseudo-Ambrose served as the source for the versions of the saint's legend found in the longer Agnetian works written by Aldhelm, Bede, and Ælfric. This chapter surveys how the theological ideas found in Ambrose's *De uirginibus* are written into the Pseudo-Ambrosian *Passio Agnetis* and then used for both instruction and devotion in the most significant Agnetian works produced in Anglo-Saxon England.

Michael Lapidge asserted in a recent article, "if we wish to understand the spirituality of Anglo-Saxon England, and before it that of sixth-century Rome, there is no more informative vehicle than the *passiones* of the Roman martyrs."³ Anglo-Saxon calendars, martyrologies, liturgies, and later passionals indicate that certain of the Roman martyrs (Agnes, Sebastian, and Cecilia especially) figured

prominently in Anglo-Saxon religious observances.⁴ Such evidence, however, points principally to monastic devotion and observance, not to the role of the Roman martyrs in the lives and devotions of the laity. Hippolyte Delehaye argued a century ago against the idea that the hagiographies written in the fifth and sixth centuries were intended for popular audiences, and concluded, “It is *assumed* that the Acts of the martyrs were generally read at public worship. But it is known that in the great majority of churches this was not the case.”⁵ Indeed, the evidence of such prominent sixth-century hagiographical works as Gregory the Great’s *Dialogi* and Gregory of Tours’s *Liber uitae patrum* suggests that popular audiences wanted to hear about local holy men and women, wanted to know that Christ might favour them as he favoured the Roman nobility of bygone days. It seems that the farther the days of the Roman Empire receded into the past, the more popular audiences in western Europe desired to hear of the power of God at work in people of their own culture and background. At the same time, however, the *uitae* and *passiones* of earlier saints, especially of martyrs, also flourished and became more elaborate. Popular audiences might no longer face the prospect of shedding their blood in martyrdom, but the ascetic life of “bloodless martyrdom” was being established and gaining prominence in the western parts of Europe during these centuries. The men and women who “died” through the practice of asceticism to worldly wealth, marriage, procreation, and physical comfort needed the inspirational example of a saint whose life would affirm the worth of their sacrifice and encourage them to remain steadfast in the ascetic lifestyle. Ambrose of Milan figures as one of the earliest western proponents of monasticism, and one of his first books, *De uirginibus*, exalts and encourages specifically female asceticism in honour of his sister, Marcellina, who had become a dedicated virgin while Ambrose’s family had lived in Rome.⁶ Ambrose wrote the earliest known *passio* of the Roman virgin-martyr Agnes as part of this work.⁷ By nature, hagiographical works invite the audience to identify with the saint, to actually become the saint in the realm of imagination and experience the saint’s trials and triumphs in a way that would promote the same characteristics in each reader or hearer. Such *uitae* and *passiones* invite the readers literally to “lose themselves in the story,” identify with the saint, then re-emerge at the end spiritually fortified by their own vicarious encounter with the power of God.⁸ Ambrose’s protégé Augustine describes this process in *De trinitate* as follows: “Nam unde in me fraterni amoris inflammatur ardor cum audio uirum aliquem pro fidei pulchritudine et firmitate acriora tormenta tolerasse? Et si mihi digito ostendatur ipse homo, studeo mihi coniungere, notum facere, amicitia conligere ... Amo itaque fidelem ac fortem uirum amore

casto atque germano ... In illa igitur aeterna ueritate ex qua temporalia facta sunt omnia formam secundum quam sumus et secundum quam uel in nobis uel in corporibus uera et recta ratione aliquid operamur uisu mentis aspiciamus.”⁹ The relationship of the audience to the saint, then, is one of recognition whereby, according to Augustine, the audience apprehends and loves the unchangeable truth of God in another human being and longs to establish rapport with that person because of a desire to come closer to God. In Book XV of *De trinitate*, Augustine argues that love itself is a function of the soul when he uses *amor* and *dilectio* as synonyms for *uoluntas* as he explains how the human soul reflects the Trinity, the Holy Spirit being the Person associated with love and will. While doing so, he comments that such love is will at its most effective. Augustine subsequently applies this idea to humans when he speaks of the memory, understanding, and will that make up the human soul synonymously as memory, understanding, and love.¹⁰ While the imaginative didacticism of a saint’s Life on one level instructs its audience in moral living, Gregory the Great teaches that on a deeper level it intends to arouse love when he writes, “Et sunt nonnulli quos ad amorem patriae caelestis plus exempla quam praedicamenta succendunt.”¹¹ Augustine and Gregory thus provide a way to understand that the desire kindled by the process of identification in a hagiographical text is not principally a sexual desire, but a desire just as strong, just as driving – a will that is love. The *passio* of St Agnes entered the literature of asceticism in the Roman world as an example of this quasi-erotic desire both for Christ as the Bridegroom of the soul and for the angelic life of heavenly society.

De uirginibus

In *De uirginibus*, Ambrose relies on scripture and the stories of virgin saints as his authorities and examples. His main concern is to exalt the life of virginity as an eschatological fulfilment, an entrance as a bride of Christ into the future life of heaven while still on earth. Ambrose teaches virgins: “non humanis iam, sed caelestibus, quorum uitam uiuis in terris, digna es comparari.”¹² He bases this thought on Jesus’s comment in Matthew 22:30: “Nam de resurrectione quid dicam, cuius praemia iam tenetis? In resurrectione autem neque nubunt neque nubentur, sed erunt sicut angeli, inquit, in caelo. Quod nobis promittitur uobis praesto est uotorumque nostrorum usus apud uos.”¹³ Since angelic beings have no sex, Ambrose teaches that both men and women who have given up the prospect of sexual relations by vowing themselves to virginity have laid hold of and begun to live the life of heavenly beings. In this way the longing of “ordinary” Christians for

the future life of spiritual union with Christ is already fulfilled in the lives of vowed virgins rather than being exclusively a matter of a future hope. Contrary to the attitudes prevalent in late antiquity, in which “women were viewed as being by nature less capable of living such a spiritual life than were men,”¹⁴ Ambrose and other proponents of virginity believe that both men and women who devote themselves to lives of chastity transcend the roles and attributes commonly expected of them. Virgins have moved beyond the natural world of sex and gender roles based upon bodily sex, and (without leaving the body) their souls have entered already into a society of relationships that transcend the material, social, and temporal bodies and relationships of the world.

These transcendent relationships disoriented the constructions of gender prevalent in Roman society at the time and reoriented them in the context of an entirely different society. Within the heavenly society, every soul rejected masculine or feminine gender constructed in the framework of oppositions and relationships between masculinity and femininity based upon biological sex and worldly social roles, for all the activities and roles associated with the differences of biological sex had been renounced. Rather, the soul’s gender became a third kind of gender, something transcendent, constructed like that of the angelic beings and based upon its relationship to God, especially to God the Son, as Ambrose describes: “Nemo ergo miretur, si angelis comparentur quae angelorum domino copulantur.”¹⁵ The result was, as Maud McInerney observes, “deeply perplexing for men and women alike ... Christian writers were determined to make virginity something it never had been in the pagan world, a state that could characterize both men and women.”¹⁶ And it is in the soul, the part of human beings that has no sex, that virgins of both sexes might seek that same existence, not as gendered beings defined in Roman society by the body’s sex, but as angelic souls, defined as such by being joined through the vow of virginity to Christ as the source of all virginity. Of the soul Ambrose writes, “istam sane inuenio, quae nullo discreta sit sexu. et cum sexum non habeat, utriusque sexus munera repraesentat, nubit concipit parit.”¹⁷ So both male and female virgins realize both masculine and feminine attributes in their souls as they become both the bride and the Body of Christ.¹⁸ Yet the angelic soul still dwells in the material world in a material body of definite sex, even though sexual and procreative activities and roles are rejected. The virgins demonstrate the soldierly masculine fortitude of their souls through their steadfast resistance to paganism and the material allurements of marriage and wealth, but they also evince the feminine desire of a bride for her bridegroom by speaking of their spiritual longing for Christ in the powerfully physical

and emotional language of erotic desire. The *passiones* of saints such as Agnes showed those dedicated to a life of virginity through their single-minded desire for Christ how they might be both soldiers and brides by resisting temptations to forsake the angelic way of life while claiming already the spiritual riches belonging to brides of the heavenly King. Ambrose tells the story briefly, because it functions simply as an illustration within a much larger work that expounds the philosophy and theology of virginity, but even so, the example of Agnes embodies the will that is love and illustrates the heavenly life lived in the temporal world.

Ambrose begins the *passio* of Agnes with an emphasis on Agnes's otherworldly character: "Deuotio supra aetatem, uirtus supra naturam, ut mihi uideatur non hominis habuisse nomen, sed oraculum martyris, quo indicauit quid esset futura."¹⁹ As he describes the virgin martyr's witness before the people, Ambrose concludes, "Effecit denique ut ei de deo crederetur, cui de homine adhuc non crederetur, quia quod ultra naturam est de auctore naturae est."²⁰ Though a child of twelve and a female, Agnes transcends the nature both of a child and of a woman (in Roman perceptions) by fearlessly facing the prospect of physical pain, defying the executioner, shunning those who desired to marry her, boldly confessing her love for Christ, and faithfully maintaining her virginity, despite both threats of torture and promises of worldly status and wealth. Even the rough executioner loses his fury when confronted with Agnes's supernatural courage and determination: "Quanto terrore egit carnifex ut timeretur, quantis blanditiis ut suaderet ... Stetit, orauit, ceruicem inflexit. Cerneris trepidare carnificem, quasi ipse addictus fuisset, tremere percussori dexteram, pallere ora alieno timentis periculo, cum puella non timeret suo."²¹ Indeed, not only does the executioner lose his fury, he trembles, shakes, grows pale, and fears – all responses that Ambrose's audience would have expected of the young girl – while Agnes conducts herself like a mature soldier, attaining the victory of a heroic death in martyrdom. Implicit in Ambrose's description is a reversal of the gendered responses and behaviours a Roman audience may have expected between the executioner and Agnes, a reversal that Ambrose describes more explicitly in his narrative of the *passio* of the Virgin of Antioch in Book II of *De uirginibus*, but that nonetheless subtly depicts the fluidity of gender characteristics in those devoted to virginity.²²

Also implicit in Ambrose's description of Agnes's mental and spiritual fortitude is a rejection of the feminine role as it was understood in late Roman society. Ambrose exclaims, "quantorum uota ut sibi ad nuptias prouenire! At illa: 'Et haec sponsi iniuria est expectare placituram, Qui me sibi prior elegit accipiet. Quid, percussor,

moraris? Pereat corpus, quod amari potest oculis quibus nolo.”²³ Both as an avowed virgin and as a member of the Church, Agnes claims a Bridegroom who has no lust for her earthly body, but rather desires her soul. Those attracted only by her body she rejects in no uncertain terms, preferring death to a life of marital embraces. By resisting the allure of worldly marriage even to the point of death, she demonstrates masculine fortitude and transcends the nature attributed to her sex by Roman culture. Simultaneously, however, she shows the feminine desire of the soul to be joined to its transcendent Bridegroom. Thus, Agnes behaves in a way consistent with both genders, rejecting the gendering thrust upon her by Roman society and seizing the likeness to angels defined in the heavenly society. Both by her place of prominence in Ambrose’s treatise and by her depiction of the Christian soul’s desire and love for its Bridegroom, Agnes becomes the ideal saint and example for those devoted to chastity. By using her story in his public sermons, Ambrose hoped to win over more support for those who vowed themselves to virginity.²⁴

De uirginibus* and the Pseudo-Ambrosian *Passio Agnetis

The inclusion of Agnes’s legend in *De uirginibus* may have served Ambrose’s desire to encourage general audiences towards vows of chastity and devotion to Christ, but it quickly became specialized and repackaged for audiences of men and women who had already taken such vows and needed encouragement to remain in them. Despite being well known on the Continent, Ambrose’s *De uirginibus* seemed to have been unknown in Anglo-Saxon England until the eleventh century, the rapid growth of monastic devotion and learning in the centuries immediately following the missionary efforts of the Irish and Roman monks notwithstanding.²⁵ Ambrose’s account of Agnes and some additional details found in Prudentius’s *Peristephanon*, along with an inscription attributed to Pope Damasus, were brought together in the narrative about Agnes known as the *Gesta Sanctae Agnetis* or the *Passio Agnetis*. The *Passio* was probably written in the early fifth century and was attributed to Ambrose throughout the Middle Ages, but is now credited to an anonymous author called Pseudo-Ambrose.²⁶ In the place of Ambrose’s brief description of the martyrdom of Agnes, the Pseudo-Ambrosian *Passio Agnetis* served as the source text for the versions of the saint’s *passio* known in Anglo-Saxon England and preserved in Aldhelm’s twin works titled *De uirginitate*, the hymn *In natali S. Agnetis*, attributed to Bede, and Ælfric’s translation in *Lives of Saints*. Through Ælfric, in particular, the *passio* spread back beyond the monastery walls into the devotional life of non-monastic audiences. In each time and

context, the telling of the story of Agnes was directed towards specific audiences with specific needs, thus shedding light on aspects of Late Roman and Anglo-Saxon devotional life and perceptions of sanctity within and without the monastery walls.

Pseudo-Ambrose amplifies details that Ambrose's brief account only suggests or mentions in passing and draws extensively upon other concepts concerning the angelic life of virgins outlined in Ambrose's work. The result is an account that depicts Agnes as a figure both of the individual soul and of the Church, a virgin who "uirum non habet, sed habet sponsum, eo quod siue ecclesia in populis siue anima in singulis dei uerbo sine ullo flexu pudoris quasi sponso innubit aeterno effeta iniuriae, feta rationis."²⁷ As such, in the *Passio* the young girl shows unexpected wisdom, courage, boldness, and fearless disregard for the allurements of wealth and marriage. Pseudo-Ambrose actually emphasizes the faculty of reason in Agnes, saying, "infantia computabatur in annis sed erat senectus mentis immensa. Corpore quidem iuuenula: sed animo cana. Pulchra facie sed pulchrior fide."²⁸ Further on, the *Passio* describes how Agnes defeats a variety of attempts by the prefect Sempronius to persuade her to marry his son when she meets his arguments: "sed eodem uultu eodem animo perseuerans terrentem similiter sicut blandientem animo deridebat."²⁹ Later during the prefect's questioning, Agnes tells him, "Noli infantiam corporalem ita in me despicere: ut putes me te uelle habere propitium: Fides enim non in annis sed in sensibus inuenitur: et deus omnipotens mentes magis comprobatur quam aetates."³⁰ Thus, Agnes behaves with a constancy of mind and spirit that late Roman society associated with heroic warriors and Stoic philosophers rather than with adolescent girls, a mindset that Ambrose refers to as the "militiam pulchritudinis" [military service of moral excellence] that characterizes consecrated virgins.³¹

This fortitude and wisdom, however, comes from Agnes's perception of herself in a relationship of love with a transcendent Being, "ut dicat Christum sponsum suum" [for she set herself apart as betrothed to Christ].³² According to Ambrose, "Primum enim quod nupturae praeter ceteris concupiscent, ut sponsi decore se iactant," and so virgins boast of their Bridegroom, Christ.³³ In the Pseudo-Ambrosian *Passio* Agnes does precisely that in her lengthy rejection of her earthly suitor. Agnes scorns the prefect's son and praises the beauty, wealth, and nobility of her divine Bridegroom, describing him as "longe te nobilior et genere et dignitate" and as being "possibilitas fortior, aspectus pulchrior, amor suauior, et omni gratia elegantior."³⁴ The rest of Agnes's response weaves together biblical passages from the Song of Songs and Psalm 45, passages used by Ambrose and other early Christian writers to describe

the conjugal relationship between Christ and his bride, the Church. Agnes appropriates these thoughts and applies them to herself as she boasts of the otherworldly riches her true Bridegroom has promised her and the chaste, but fruitful, embraces that they will share. These are largely the same passages that Ambrose uses to describe the gifts that Christ will give to those who devote themselves to virginity and to his Church.³⁵

Pseudo-Ambrose also uses concepts from *De uirginibus* to adapt Prudentius's account of Agnes's condemnation to exposure in a brothel. In *Peristephanon*, passers-by avoid looking at Agnes out of sorrow for her plight, but one rude young man dares to look at her and promptly a bolt of light blinds the young man and leaves him convulsing upon the ground.³⁶ Pseudo-Ambrose uses this scene to illustrate Ambrose's teaching that angels provide a special protection for virgins: "Vobis autem, uirgines sanctae, speciale praesidium est, quae pudore intemerato sacrum domini seruatis cubile. Neque mirum si pro uobis angeli militant quae angelorum moribus militatis."³⁷ This concept appears in the *Passio* in the form of the shining angel of the Lord who appears when Agnes is stripped and sent by Sempronius to a brothel because of her refusal to marry his son or become a Vestal Virgin. "Cum ingenti constantia" [with enormous steadfastness], Agnes tells Sempronius, "habeo custodem corporis mei angelum domini."³⁸ And indeed, an angel appears and protects her modesty from the evil intentions of every man who comes into the brothel to ogle her by filling the place with a splendid radiance that no man's gaze could penetrate. The angel even causes the death of Sempronius's son when the young man rushes in to violate Agnes. Christ also provides for the protection of Agnes's modesty by sending her a shining white garment that fits her perfectly. Pseudo-Ambrose's specific reference to a white garment symbolizes Agnes's purity and triumph as the bride of Christ described in the book of Apocalypse: "Gaudeamus et exultemus et demus gloriam ei quia venerunt nuptiae agni et uxor eius praeparavit se et datum est illi ut cooperiat se byssinum splens candidum byssinum enim iustificationes sunt sanctorum."³⁹ Throughout scripture white clothing refers to those who have been made pure, to angels, and also to Christ's clothing during the Transfiguration.⁴⁰ Agnes's shining white garment, a gift from Christ, symbolically proclaims the purity and perfection of her love for Christ and her readiness for marriage to the Lamb.⁴¹

The one significant passage of Ambrose's *Passio* of Agnes that Pseudo-Ambrose omits entirely is the scene in which the executioner trembles and turns pale when confronted by Agnes's fortitude in facing death. In Pseudo-Ambrose's account of Agnes's death, there is a mob

scene in which Aspasius attempts to immolate the young saint, but the flames fail when Agnes prays. Aspasius then seizes his sword and plunges it into Agnes's neck, giving both the rioting crowd and the saint what each desired.⁴² Pseudo-Ambrose passes over Ambrose's elegant implication of reversed gender characteristics between Agnes and her executioner, perhaps because the point had already been made in a more intellectual way through her earlier spirited exchanges with Sempronius.

Thus, the *Passio* written by Pseudo-Ambrose draws in (and occasionally seems to improve upon) many of the ideas found in other parts of Ambrose's *De uirginibus*, holding up Agnes as the perfect example of ascetic (and thus monastic) ideals. She resists with exemplary fortitude and courage all the temptations the world has to offer: high-status marriage, wealth, and freedom from the pain of threatened punishments. She also attains all the desires of the soul: the heavenly Bridegroom; perpetual fruitfulness; spiritual riches that do not perish; freedom from the temporal, material world; and a place in the exalted society of angels and virgins in heaven. Though Ambrose used the *passio* of Agnes within a sermon designed to appeal to a popular audience, Pseudo-Ambrose inserts Ambrose's ideas from the sermon into his *Passio* through the use of symbolism. Only an audience already immersed in the symbols would understand their meaning and importance within the context of patristic teachings on virginity. In the Pseudo-Ambrosian *Passio*, we find what Thomas J. Heffernan describes as the principal function of a saint's story: "The function of the text was not only to document the wondrous appearance of the divine in a man or woman, but also to interpret for the community what was only partially understood, mysteriously hidden in the well-known public record, buried in the very ideal of sanctity itself."⁴³ Pseudo-Ambrose declares at the end of the *Passio* that he (she?) has written this work to honour such a great virgin martyr, "et ad aedificationem uestram o uirgines Christi textum passionis eius credidi destinandum obsecrans caritatem spiritus sancti ut labour noster in uestra imitatione fructum in conspectu domini ualeat inuenire."⁴⁴ Writing for a specific audience, communities of monastic men or women, Pseudo-Ambrose creates out of the bare bones of Ambrose's description of Agnes's death a hagiography rich in symbolism and allegory that depicts, for those who know how to recognize it, the virginal soul's resistance to all worldly temptation because of its will to love the heavenly Bridegroom.

Passio Agnetis* and Aldhelm's *De uirginitate

It seems only natural that such an encouragement to the monastic way

of life should travel with or soon after the missionary monks into Anglo-Saxon England. Whereas in Continental Europe the impulse to monasticism came after Christianity had become accepted and widespread in the Roman Empire, monasticism in early Anglo-Saxon England was a missionary venture. Monasteries were outposts of Christianity in essentially pagan territory and through them the surrounding areas were evangelized and instructed in Christian doctrine. It comes as no surprise, then, that the Anglo-Saxons' earliest literary figure, Aldhelm, adapts the *Passio Agnetis* for *De uirginitate*, his *opus geminatum*.⁴⁵ This work, addressed to an audience of female monastics but probably also intended for a wider monastic audience including men, was written first in a highly ornate prose version and then in an equally challenging metrical version. In the prose version, Aldhelm diagnoses and addresses two related problems: pride and the worldly love of expensive clothing and jewelry. It may seem strange to find a collection of saints' legends in a work addressing such topics, but Aldhelm uses the legends of both male and female saints as an antidote to pride (by reminding his audience how much better the saints of old had done) and as examples of the proper attitude those devoted to chastity should have towards the allurements of temporal wealth and luxury.⁴⁶ For example, in an attempt to instill humility among lifelong virgins he compares their lukewarm desire for Christ with the ardour of women who had been married before taking the veil: "Et tamen plerumque, pro dolor, immutatis ordinibus versa vice contingere solet, ut inferioris uitae gradus usquequaque paulatim proficiens superiorem tepide torpentem praeoccupet et ... qui existimabatur praeteritae conuersationis neglegentia posterior, deinceps diuinae caritatis flamma succensus existat anterior euangelicae reminiscens sententiae: *cui multum dimittitur, multum diligit*, et qui contempta mundi blandimenta uelut quisquiliarum peripsema respuens ac carnalis luxur lenocinia refutans in sancto proposito successor extiterat, sumpto uiriliter castae conuersationis tirocinio ... et aeternae uitae desiderio flagrans ... cum sudoris industria efficiatur antecessor."⁴⁷ Aldhelm uses the language of desire ("diuinae caritatis flamma" and "desiderio flagrans") to express the will that is love that motivates previously married women to excel in love for Christ beyond the virgins who, content to rest upon the laurels of their bodily virginity, have become proud and self-confident, allowing themselves to dabble in worldly luxuries and so cooling their desire for Christ's love and heavenly rewards. For such an audience, the stories of Agnes and other saints served as both a corrective and encouragement. Furthermore, Aldhelm uses the language of military training and accomplishment to describe the devotion of the formerly married nuns. According to Lewis and Short, the Latin term *tirocinium*

denotes “the first military service or campaign of a young soldier,” a service that women in the second rank of chastity (women who were formerly married or widows) undertake *uiriliter* [manfully, courageously]. Aldhelm’s use of such masculine metaphorical language is not accidental, but reflects the concepts that he found in the writings of earlier proponents of virginity and also in Pseudo-Ambrose’s *Passio*.

Aldhelm drastically abridges Pseudo-Ambrose’s narrative by leaving out several otherwise salient parts of the earlier work. In both the prose and the metrical accounts, Aldhelm omits any physical description of Agnes, and in the prose account he tells how Agnes is stripped of her clothing, but focuses on the glorious robe of light that God provides for her rather than the miraculous way her hair covered her body. Both this detail and her actual martyrdom by a sword thrust to the throat are omitted in the metrical version. Aldhelm focuses his narrative solely on the saint’s virginal disdain for the worldly wealth and luxurious trappings that her suitor offers to entice her into marriage: “Quae pro integritate seruanda omnem ornamentorum gloriam a proco, praefecti filio, oblatam, quatenus optata impetraret conubia, ut lurida fetentis cloacae volutabra contempnens.”⁴⁸ For Agnes, worldly riches have all the appeal of raw sewage, and Aldhelm implies that his audience should adopt the same attitude.

In order to shape the original story to his purposes, Aldhelm quotes only once from his source, a short version of Agnes’s biting refusal of the marriage offer from her suitor. In this quotation, Agnes delivers a string of insults to her suitor, calling him “fomes peccati, nutrimentum facinoris, pabulum mortis,” and then she states that she already has another lover.⁴⁹ Aldhelm then omits most of Agnes’s description of the riches and jewels with which her Heavenly Lover has adorned her. He quotes only, “me anulo fidei suae subarrauit, circumdedit me uernantibus atque coruscantibus gemmis, induit me ciclade auro texta,” before skipping even more description by Agnes of the ornaments that Christ has given her and her description of their embraces.⁵⁰ Aldhelm’s point seems quite clear: the perishable valuables offered by the temporal world are worse than dirt in comparison with imperishable spiritual riches that belong to Christ’s virgin brides, but he does not want greed for earthly wealth to be replaced by greed for a heavenly variety. Agnes successfully resists the temptation that is placed before her because her participation in the society of heaven changes her perspective and she now looks upon her earthly suitor’s gifts as she would the contents of a latrine.

Having warned his audience against such deceits, Aldhelm directs attention at the end of the *Prosa de uirginitate* towards developing

strength of will through a pure mind: “Omne etenim purae uirginitatis priuilegium potius in solo liberae mentis praesidio seruatur, quam in arto carnis clustello continetur, et magis inflexibili ultroneae uoluntatis arbitrio salubriter tutatur, quam coacto corporis famulatu funditus ad nihilum redigatur.”⁵¹ He emphasizes the desire to preserve the integrity not just of the body but of the will for the sake of Christ, showing his audience that purity of the will is more important than the outward purity of the body alone. This pure will belongs to a mind free from any desire for material wealth or worldly status because it is fixed upon its heavenly goal and its desire is for a heavenly Bridegroom. In the prose story of Agnes, Aldhelm illustrates this concept in his description of Agnes’s experience in the brothel: “Et licet huius rei gratia ad inuisum prostibuli lupanar ... truderetur, tamen corusco immensi luminis splendore uallata angelicis fruitur conspectibus et peplis donatur dominicis.”⁵² Agnes had just made the point that angels attend upon her Bridegroom before being thrust into the brothel, but her holy fortitude brings heaven to earth in the bawdy house and she finds herself surrounded with the glory of the angelic realm as she is clothed in Christ’s own garment. Like his source, Aldhelm contrasts the glory of chastity with the filth of carnal lust, leaving no doubt about which one his audience should pursue.

Not just in the story of Agnes, but throughout the entire *De uirginitate* Aldhelm attempts to turn his audience away from any desire for wealth and marital intercourse by associating sex and riches with images of a sewer or latrine full of urine and excrement, and also of vomit.⁵³ He considers the renunciation of wealth and family and unswerving commitment to a life of chastity to be necessary evidences of sanctity for both men and women.⁵⁴ In his adaptation of Pseudo-Ambrose’s *Passio Agnetis*, Aldhelm focuses upon these complementary themes in order to encourage his monastic audience to imitate Agnes so that they might rekindle the will that is love in their own souls and thus be suitable members of the society of heaven.

Passio Agnetis* and the Hymn *In natali S. Agnetis

The symbolism in Pseudo-Ambrose’s *Passio* concerning the life of the individual soul may also have motivated the composition of the Anglo-Latin hymn *In natali S. Agnetis*. Agnes was one of the three most popular Roman martyrs in Anglo-Saxon England, and it seems reasonable that the monks of Wearmouth, Jarrow, and other monasteries would have wanted a hymn to honour her day.⁵⁵ Michael Lapidge argues on metrical and stylistic grounds that this hymn is an authentic work of Bede.⁵⁶ It was written along with other hymns to

augment the “Old Hymnal” used in Canterbury: “Bede clearly felt that the provision for the liturgical year in the Canterbury “Old Hymnal” was inadequate; his *Liber hymnorum*, in other words, was composed as a supplement to the “Old Hymnal,” the ten liturgical hymns being spread evenly throughout the church year.”⁵⁷ Whatever the motivation for its composition, the hymn was certainly written to address the devotional foci of those leading a monastic life, rather than for general use by the laity, not only because of its Latin composition and liturgical function, but because of the specifically monastic themes it embodies. The hymn *In natali S. Agnetis*, however, not only assumes Christian belief but also assumes knowledge of Agnes’s story and of the monastic aspirations it symbolizes (see the appendix for the text and translation).

The first stanza follows its source in announcing the outcome of the story at the beginning, but stanza 2 departs from the order of presentation in the *Passio* and dwells upon the eschatological vision of Agnes’s entry into the court of heaven, her marriage to the *Agnus Dei*: “Intrauit Agnes auream / Poli triumphans regiam / Agnique iuncta dulcibus / Congratulatur nuptiis.”⁵⁸ The playful pun on Agnes’s name reflects the joy of the occasion. While Aldhelm focused upon Agnes’s rejection of the enticements of earthly society and her experience of heavenly light on earth, Bede draws attention to Agnes’s place and status as a member of heavenly society after her martyrdom. Surrounded by all the virgins of heaven, Agnes joins in singing a new song in praise of God in the third stanza, recalling the scene in Pseudo-Ambrose wherein Agnes’s parents see a vision of “exercitum uirginum: quae omnes auro textis cycladibus indutae cum ingenti lumine praeteribant: inter quas uident beatissimam Agnetem simili ueste fulgentem.”⁵⁹ The description of the virgins’ clothing recalls Agnes’s earlier claim that her Bridegroom “induit me cyclade auro texta” [clothes me in a state robe of gold cloth].⁶⁰ Surrounded by this host of virgins and equal to them in radiance, she tells her parents to “congaudete mihi atque congratulamini: quia cum his omnibus lucidas sedes accepi: et illi iuncta sum in coelis.”⁶¹ Bede draws all of these ideas into a new context in the early stanzas of the hymn, thus emphasizing the eschatological element of Agnes’s story for his monastic audience. The suggestion for the lines in the third stanza that describe Agnes and the virgins singing a new song to the Father and the Son may have come from Prudentius, but, if so, Bede has changed the context from Agnes’s triumph of protecting her modesty from the gaze of the public to Agnes’s triumph in fully entering the life of heaven.⁶² In Bede’s hands, these ideas come together to suggest to the monks singing the liturgy that they, too, are joined through their vows with Agnes and the host of virgins in the court of heaven, uniting their

voices with them in praise to the Father and the Son together. Bede assumes that those who sing and hear this hymn understand the significance of her triumph, marriage, and membership among the heavenly host, for he gives no explanation for these references but simply proceeds with the story. Yet all the themes that depict the fluidity of masculine and feminine gender boundaries among those vowed to chastity are present in Bede's hymn.

Stanzas 4 and 5 provide a concise synopsis of what Agnes did in order to attain her place of honour among the virgins of Christ. Bede omits the details of the marriage proposal from Sempronius's son and passes over Agnes's long and colourful refusal and the dialogue of her questioning by Sempronius. Instead he points out that Agnes earned her place because she spurned temporal prosperity and status "amore Christi."⁶³ Having vowed herself to Christ, she courageously stood firm against all opposition. Bede's choice of words here, specifically "pulsata" [battered], seems odd. Pseudo-Ambrose never indicates that Agnes was actually struck or tortured before the attempt to burn her, so at first glance Bede seems to have added a new detail to Agnes's story. Bede's language, however, matches Pseudo-Ambrose's phrasing, "terroribus pulsat" [he battered her with threats], which suggests the military imagery of a battering ram used against the gates of a fortified position. Within this context, Bede's reference to Agnes also being opposed "asperis spiculis" [with keen darts] further builds upon the military imagery of a siege, with archers shooting at the defenders of the walls. Such darts would then also refer to the threats and insults hurled at Agnes by Sempronius as he tried to convince her to abandon her vow to Christ. With soldierly fortitude "fortis fide perseuerat," unshaken by the verbal assault, she successfully defended the citadel of her mind and her commitment to Christ.⁶⁴ Such language would not have surprised anyone familiar with the hagiographical commonplace of virgins as soldiers of Christ.

Having passed over much of the description of Agnes's refusal of marriage and her trial by Sempronius, Bede now focuses on the most miraculous aspect of the story and the aspect that shows Agnes to be part of a transcendent society, clothed in a garment provided by Christ and protected by an angel. Bede uses chiasmus and parallel in stanzas 6 and 7 in order to draw out an allegorical interpretation of the miracle of the shining white garment that Agnes received from Christ when she was sent to the brothel. Like Aldhelm, Bede skips over the way the girl's long hair initially covered her body after she had been stripped, highlighting instead the change of clothing and the connection between the purity and steadfastness of Agnes's heart and the garment. Still drawing upon the siege imagery, Bede describes by chiasmus how her

enemy takes away the outer garment: “*Stolam sed intus pectoris / Auferre nemo quiuerat.*”⁶⁵ This rhetorical ploy points Bede’s monastic audience to the patristic teaching that true chastity in the form of faithfulness to Christ may be maintained in the heart/mind even if one’s physical chastity is threatened or lost. The parallel structure of the seventh stanza, though, takes the lesson even further. Christ gave Agnes an outward garment to preserve her modesty from prying eyes. Bede finds in this act an allegorical lesson not explicitly mentioned in Pseudo-Ambrose: the clothing of the soul with a linen garment “of truth.” Given the parallel structure with stanza 5 and the biblical symbolism by which linen garments are associated with priesthood and with purity, we may understand Bede’s allegorical explanation as encouragement to clothe the heart with purity or holiness through fidelity to a chaste way of life.⁶⁶ Within the context of late Roman hagiography, however, the new garment held an additional meaning. It symbolized the putting off of masculine and feminine gender roles assigned by the world and the donning of a new definition of gender within the new society of heaven by being “clothed in Christ” as described in Galatians 3:27–8: “*quicumque enim in christo baptizati estis Christum induistis non est Iudaeus neque Graecus non est servus neque liber non est masculus neque femina omnes enim vos unum estis in Christo Iesu.*”⁶⁷

Within the theology of virginity espoused by Ambrose, Jerome, and other patristic authors, men and women who vowed themselves to chastity became clothed in Christ, a third kind of gender.⁶⁸

The theme of purity continues in the eighth stanza, for Agnes’s purity was so great that her sordid surroundings cannot spoil her sanctity. Indeed, Bede adapts Pseudo-Ambrose’s comment, “*lupanar locus efficitur orationis*” [the brothel is made into a place of prayer], into the last two lines of the stanza.⁶⁹ The opposing ideas of outer filth and inner holiness and the power of the virgin’s inward purity to hallow the bordello reinforce the lesson of stanzas 6 and 7. These ideas vividly depict the power of the saint’s desire for Christ to bring heaven to earth in a sense, by already living as though in heaven while still on earth.

Another sign of Agnes’s participation in the transcendent society of heaven while within the most earthy and earthly of places is the appearance of the light that protects Agnes and announces the presence of heaven. Still using the techniques of parallel and opposition, Bede suggests that the nature of the light is the same as that of Agnes, for it radiates holiness in an evil place, which contrasts the shining nature of Agnes with demons who lurk in dark places. In the last two lines the

opposition continues as Bede triumphantly foreshadows that the stroke that slays Sempronius's son reveals the servant of life when Agnes restored the youth to life. Stanza 10 explains that those who mock miracles may be punished with death, an idea found also in Pseudo-Ambrose's *Passio* in the context of Agnes's provision with the shining garment: "Ita namque ad mensuram corpusculi eius aptum erat indumentum: et ita nimio candore conspicuum: ut nullus dubitaret hoc nisi angeli manibus praeparatum."⁷⁰ Sempronius's son, however, "uidens tantum lumen circa eam non dedit honorem deo: sed irridens in ipso limine prius quam uel manu eam contingerat: cecidit in faciem suam: et praefocatus a diabolo expirauit."⁷¹ The miracle, then, is the heavenly garment itself, which not only preserves Agnes's modesty, but also symbolizes her transformation into a being like the angels while still in this life. Bede still relies on those who use the hymn to know the complete version of Agnes's *Passio*, for otherwise neither of these stanzas makes much sense. Anyone who knew the work of Pseudo-Ambrose, however, would recognize the reference to the upright who acknowledge the miracle of God and honour Agnes as well as the reference to the punishment of the young man who still intended to rape the girl despite the signs of her sanctity.

Bede next draws a parallel between the resuscitation of Sempronius's son and Agnes's own ascent "ad astra" through martyrdom towards heaven.⁷² This stanza suggests the influence of Prudentius more than Pseudo-Ambrose and may reflect elements of the Spanish poet's description of Agnes's soul leaving her body and following the shining path through the spheres towards the abode of God.⁷³ Bede does mention that Agnes overcame both "houses" and "iron gates," oblique references to the house of prostitution that became a house of prayer and the sword that ultimately ushered her into martyrdom, but otherwise he omits any description of the method of her martyrdom. Thus, the martyred virgin takes her rightful place in the heavenly society described in the first stanzas of the hymn, seeing the glory of God and singing hymns of praise in her own native land for eternity. Though Bede speaks of Agnes as virgin, soldier, and bride, he avoids the erotic language of Ambrose and Pseudo-Ambrose, focusing instead upon the glory that God bestows upon Agnes because of her love for Christ. The saint maintains her faith and vow and the angelic realm is drawn into the human world in proof of her sanctity.

Passio Agnetis* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints

Agnes's appeal to a monastic audience, at least in Aldhelm's and Bede's eyes, clearly rested upon her embodiment of the hopes and aspirations

of men and women who chose to turn away from the material constraints and gender definitions of the world's societies and devote themselves to living in chastity like the angels because of their love for Christ. But what significance might the story of Agnes bear for a non-monastic audience in Anglo-Saxon England?⁷⁴ All the versions of the legend expressed by Pseudo-Ambrose, Aldhelm, and Bede were clearly intended to encourage a sanctity obtainable through virginal life and devotion, but how might Agnes's *passio* enter into the life and devotion of laypeople and perhaps secular (i.e., non-monastic) clergy? What might the legend surrounding the death of a woman distant in time and geography, as Rosalind Love points out in [chapter 12](#) of this volume, have to say to an audience of non-monastic Anglo-Saxons? At the end of the tenth century, Ælfric translated the legend of Agnes as part of a collection intended to encourage secular audiences by making known the lives of saints “þe mynstermenn mid heora þenungum betwux him wurðiað”⁷⁵ and that “læwedan men ... nyston.”⁷⁶ Ælfric may have included the *passio* of Agnes because, by embodying the life of the Christian soul and the Church, she acts as a point of contact wherein, as Peter Brown has said, heaven and earth are joined.⁷⁷ The power and beauty of one such as Agnes inflame desire in the audience, not a desire for the saint but a desire to *be* the saint, to join the company of those who live the lives of angels on earth in order to be brides of Christ in heaven. As such, Ælfric may have included the *passio* of Agnes in his translation as a means of encouraging the secular clergy and the laity to firmly resist the pagan Vikings, to leave behind the desire for worldly marriages, and to enter into lives of monastic chastity.

Ælfric's translation of the *passio* of Agnes appeals to its audience precisely in terms of desire, the desire of the saint for Christ, which then reproduces itself in the reader/hearer as she or he identifies with the saint and thus participates in the same will that is love. At this time no one has been able to establish whether or not Ælfric directly knew Augustine's comments on the will that is love, but what is certain is that he knew through intermediary sources such as Alcuin this idea about the will that is love and the association Augustine makes between will, love, and the Holy Spirit, for Ælfric states in the Sermon on the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, “and se halga gast is heora begra wylle . and lufu . of him bam.”⁷⁸ Further on, Ælfric connects the Trinity to its image in the human soul: “Seo sawle hæfð swa swa we ær cwædon on hire gecynde . þære halgan þrynnysse anlicnysse . on þan þe heo hæfð gemynd . and andgit . and wyllan.”⁷⁹ The Old English word Ælfric uses to translate “voluntas” here in both instances is “willa” [purpose, design, command (determination, resolution), intention, desire to act]. In his translation of the Latin *passio*, Ælfric

shows that he clearly understands and communicates to a non-monastic audience that the will that is love lies at the root of Agnes's sanctity.

Following the Latin exemplar closely, Ælfric describes Agnes as "snotor" [wise] and "ealdlic on mode" [mature in mind], in contrast to her youth, and these descriptors continue the emphasis on mental fortitude found in Pseudo-Ambrose, Aldhelm, and Bede.⁸⁰ Agnes's belief, however, was no mere intellectual assent, for Ælfric points out that "heo lufode crist," making the object of Agnes's love and belief one and the same.⁸¹ As is true of Pseudo-Ambrose, Ælfric's focus in his translation may be summed up in those three words: *heo lufode crist*. For the most part, he follows the Latin source closely because his intended audience was assumed to be unfamiliar with the story of Agnes and its symbolism. Ælfric has to paint for them the picture of the soul as Christ's bride, so he retains the integral parts of Pseudo-Ambrose's account in which Agnes represents the believing soul's desire for God, a desire that redirects Agnes's love away from a male/female sexual relationship to a Lover/Beloved spiritual relationship. In the same way, the desire that her *passio* arouses in the audience is not the desire of a man for a woman, but a movement of the will, of love, towards Christ, for which the closest analogue in strength and intensity is erotic desire, the erotic desire of a woman for her lover, her bridegroom. Agnes's belief in and love for the transcendent Other translates her life from the material order of riches and marriage into the transcendent order of grace, salvation, and relationship with God.

Yet the tension of the erotic imagery used by a pure virgin remains in Ælfric as it is found in Pseudo-Ambrose. Agnes declares "Ic hæbbe oðerne lufiend / þinne ungelican . on æðelborennysse."⁸² She claims Christ as her own lover, a better lover than the son of the prefect will ever be. The language of the rest of Agnes's speech is paradoxically embodied and femininely sexual in its portrayal of her standing as a virgin bride of Christ, as Renée Trilling notes in [chapter 11](#) of this volume. In the Latin text, Agnes not only speaks in terms of the imperishable riches her heavenly Lover possesses, but speaks of Christ himself in sexual and desiring terms, which Ælfric translates very closely: "Of his muðe ic underfeng meoluc . and hunig . / nu iu ic eom beclypt . mid his clænum earmum . / his fægera lichama is minum geferlæht . / and his blod geglende mine eahhringas ."⁸³ While not quite so directly embodied, the closing words to Agnes's speech also speak of her union with the transcendent Bridegroom in sexual terms: "Þonne ic hine lufige . ic beo eallunga clæne . / þonne ic hine hreppæ . ic beo unwemme . / ðonne ic hine underfo . ic beo mæden forð . / and þær bærn ne ateoriað . on ðam brydlace . / Þær is eacnung buton sare . and singallic wæstmbærnyss ."⁸⁴ In both Pseudo-Ambrose's and Ælfric's

versions, the fulfilment of Agnes's love for Christ will come with the culmination of her desire: the spiritually wedded state, the consummation of pure and holy desire that is perpetually fruitful and satisfying. The recognition of her true love gives rise to desire, which in turn gives rise to belief in the fulfilment of that desire. Agnes shows absolute confidence in her transcendent Lover, so much so that she steadfastly turns down every offer of wealth that the prefect's son makes as though he were offering sewage.⁸⁵ In doing so, she demonstrates the way to pursue the heavenly life, which refuses to be distracted by material, temporal allurements, so that the soul may focus its desire solely upon the divine. By proving herself to be a true lover of Christ, Agnes also proves herself to be a true soldier of Christ. According to Stephen Morrison, in Ælfric's version "the point of engagement for the audience lies, therefore, not in the love itself but in the conflict between, on the one hand, God and his servants, and the devil and his followers on the other. That the 'theme' of love is absorbed into the archetypal pattern of spiritual warfare, thereby losing its proper identity [as a love story] is evident from statements which equate the preservation of virginity with the steadfastness of faith."⁸⁶ The soldier's love for king and homeland thus becomes feminized, even as a bride's love for her bridegroom takes on masculine features. While Ælfric does not attempt to address the issue of gender within the context of virginity as Ambrose did, Agnes's behaviour speaks for itself as Ælfric describes her defiance towards the powerful father of her human suitor.

When Agnes refuses to marry his son, the Roman prefect Sempronius tries to persuade her with flattery and then with threats of dire punishment if she does not abandon her devotion to Christ.⁸⁷ Agnes, however, repeatedly proclaims her love for Christ in both Latin and Old English versions.⁸⁸ When Sempronius warns the thirteen-year-old saint not to anger the Roman gods, she responds:

Se ælmihtiga herað

swiðor manna mod . þonne heora mycclan ylde .
and se geleafa ne bið on gearum . ac bið on glæwum andgitum .
Læt þine godas geysian . gif hi aht magon .
Læt hi sylfe beodan þæt we us to him gebiddan .
gif þu þis don ne miht . drece us loca hu þu wylle .⁸⁹

Agnes's words again underscore the importance not so much of virginity, but of belief. Her knowledge of God also provides her with the knowledge of the importance of her own mind, the image of God in her own soul. The pagan idols carved of stone and decorated with gold

cannot harm her, so she defies Sempronius to act in their stead. When Sempronius then threatens to send her to a brothel to be raped, taunting her that “ðā cristenan ne magon þe þonne ahreddan,” Agnes responds, “gif ðu cuðest mine god . ne cwæde þu ðas word . Orsorhlice ic forseo þine þeowracan . forþan þe ic geara cann mines drihtnes mihte Ic hæbbe godes encgel haligne mid me.”⁹⁰ Armed with such knowledge, Agnes remains unmoved by the persuasions and threats of Sempronius, and she actually dares him to torment her (a theme further explored in [chapter 12](#) of this volume).

On Sempronius’s orders, Agnes is stripped of her clothing, but miraculously, “þæs mædenes fex . befeng hi eall abutan . sona swa þa cwelleras hire claðas of abrudon . and þæt fex hi behelede on ælce healfes gelice.”⁹¹ The immediacy with which Agnes’s hair covers her allows for no gazing upon her nakedness. She is stripped, to be sure, but the reader’s attention is directed not to the naked body of the saint, but to the abundance of hair with which God miraculously clothes her, thereby protecting her from the humiliation and defilement intended by Sempronius. Agnes despises Sempronius’s threats and determines to remain true to Christ by neither marrying the prefect’s son nor offering sacrifices to Vesta as Sempronius has commanded. Nor does she believe that defilement among the harlots can touch the inner chastity of her love for Christ. Sempronius nevertheless orders that the virgin be dragged to a brothel so that she might be raped and thus despoiled of her virginity, “ac heo gemette þær sona scinende godes encgel . swa þæt nan man ne mihte for ðam myccclum leohte hire on beseon . oððe hi hreppan . for þan þe ðet hus eall scean . swa swa sunne on dæg . and swa hi hi gearnlicor sceawodon . swa scimodon heora eagon swiðor .”⁹² God honours Agnes’s constancy of mind by protecting both body and soul from defilement and shows all who enter that Agnes belongs to the society of heaven by bringing heaven into the brothel through the presence of the saint and the angel sent to protect her. Ælfric drives home the point: “Þa wearð þæra myltestrena hus mannum to gebædhuse . and ælc seðe Inneode . arwurðode god . for þam heofonlican leohte . þe on ðam huse scean.”⁹³ Only the son of Sempronius fails to respond to this heavenly sight with praise. Instead, he rushes in to despoil the virgin and is immediately struck dead. Ælfric does not translate Pseudo-Ambrose’s narrative comment about the fate of those who despise miracles, but the thought is explained nonetheless in his translation of Agnes’s retort to Sempronius:

hwi synd þa oðre cuce .

þe hider inneodon . buton forðon þe hi arwurðodon
þone ælmihtigan god . þe me myldheortlice gescrydde .

and asende me his encgel . þe mine lichaman geheold .
seþe wæs fram cyldcradole criste gehalgod .
þine sceamleasa sunu . mid sceamleasum anginne .
arn into me . ac se encgel hine afylde .
and ðam deofle betæhte . þe hine adydde þærrihte .⁹⁴

The virgin tells Sempronius that his son brought this fate upon himself through his disrespect for the miraculous light and garment. The proper response to an encounter with heavenly society should be praise for and worship of God, as evidenced by the reactions of the other men who had tried to enter the hallowed brothel. Sempronius's son, however, had failed to acknowledge the presence of the heavenly and instead had tried to carry out his wicked intention of rape, thus bringing judgment and destruction upon himself. When Agnes prays for the young man to be restored, she does so not out of compassion for the dead youth or for his grieving father, but because "is tima . þæt drihtnes miht beo gewutelod."⁹⁵ The angel of Christ revives Sempronius's son and the young man immediately begins praising the Christian God. No longer is his will set on sexual desire for Agnes, and after his encounter with heavenly power he is full of praise for God.

Following this episode, the Romans accuse Agnes of practising sorcery and attempt to burn her. But instead of immolating the saint, the fire turns against the crowd and consumes them. Agnes praises God for the miracle, but after hearing her words of praise, an even greater crowd clamours for her execution. As her martyrdom approaches, Agnes sees in it the fulfilment of her greatest desire:

þæt þæt ic gelyfde þæt ic geseo .
ðæt þæt ic gehihte . þæt ic hæbbe nu .
þe ic andette mid muðe . and mid minre heortan .
and mid eallum innoðe . ic þe gewilnige .
ænne soþne god . þe mid þinum suna rixast .
and mid þam halgan gaste . an ælmihtig god æfre .⁹⁶

With those words, Agnes receives the crown of martyrdom and the fulfilment of her holy desire. She enacts her love for Christ through her will to die rather than turn her love to any lesser person or material object. The defeated Roman authorities comply with her desire by means of a sword stroke to the throat.

In translating the *passio* of Agnes for a non-monastic audience, Ælfric reveals the fortitude and passion that could fill a heart single-mindedly fixed upon Christ. By demonstrating the power of the will that is love

both to resist the representatives of paganism and to preserve her own physical and mental purity, Agnes shows how those who love Christ above all bring heaven to earth through their devotion, creating in the minds of those who hear her story a vision of what it must be like to live in the company of angels. As such, Ælfric's translation of the *passio* of Agnes serves once again the function of both apology and persuasion to the life of chastity, the function for which Ambrose first recorded his account of Agnes's martyrdom. From Ambrose to Pseudo-Ambrose to Aldhelm to Bede to Ælfric, Agnes's legend has come full circle, starting as part of a public defence of virginity written in honour of a virgin (Ambrose's sister, Marcellina), then spreading to Anglo-Saxon England as part of principally monastic observance and exhortation, and finally re-entering the world beyond the monastery in a vernacular translation written under the patronage of laymen. Yet whatever the audience, whatever the purpose, among the Anglo-Saxons Agnes's hagiographers emphasized the theme of Agnes's holy desire as the source of her sanctity. Her desire depicts the will to love that rejects worldly attachments, resolutely maintains virginity, draws heaven to earth on her behalf, and places her in the transcendent society of angels, thus making Agnes a proper focus of devotion and an example of female sanctity worthy of imitation by monastics, secular religious, and lay audiences alike.

Appendix: *In natali S. Agnetis*

~~The principal day of the blessed~~
~~virgin has~~
~~Disclosed upon this day; the day on which~~
~~Qua into triumph she doth pass,~~
~~She receiveth joys of perpetual life.~~

~~Agnes, this Agnes, the golden~~
~~Colours of her robes in triumph,~~
~~Agnes she rejoices, joined to the~~
~~Song of the angels of the Lamb.~~

~~And with the assembly of pure~~
~~Virgins in the courts of heaven,~~
~~She sends forth the words of song to God~~
~~The Father and the Son together.~~

~~She is dignified by a reward,~~
~~Who hath despised prospering prosperity~~

And fishy people of the world
From the Christ's Christat.

Baptised also by keepest arts
Alopposition, shiplesseveres
Straitfideipehefreith,
Thaishehadlqanerlyoverat to Christ.

Theostisgentxeneanythore away the mantle
From phellapaldfuthe girl,
Butlano and ouldpactoryisway
Theerobenofthequienatwithin.

ButundethChrist adonsetwardly
Minds poodeto theigin
Heachingithis thiswoman is clothed
Düctheinnivard gantre of truth.

Havingbein dedintoordious of vileness,
Asondartyanyfridfransfilth;
Qstadee from poptadulif prostitution
Suddenlyappeafiof prayer is made.

Whufornaturcklight place of demons
Isabup quondheavenandwhen
Thesprinketof pleathias been driven away,
The servant of life is discerned.

Theuprightbaptomeghalmighty works
Andhonothe God of theismartyr;
Blutstreamkarulf the miracle
Soonisoptendged wlehtisunitable death.

TheAblefedi martyriarousing him
Mortytheptalscofahsl,
Stupenlaughabfesseand iron gates
Alessthepottatpratsat.

WhQuasbordis gloriam
Thenglori pñheacredator for evermore
Andsietginhympatriacong the
Cähestisdythmbeavrdynhomeland.

11 Heavenly Bodies: Paradoxes of Female Martyrdom in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*

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Narratives of martyrdom are built around a certain paradox: the use of violence, sex, and spectacle to reinforce ideas of peace, chastity, and virtue. Saints suffer tortures far more gruesome and graphic than anything from a Germanic battle scene, and at first glance it seems incongruous that hagiography should teach its spiritual lessons by focusing on a saint's most material form: his or her body. In these cases, violence claims to serve as the gateway to spiritual understanding. At the same time, however, there is a certain scopophilic *jouissance* in the spectacle of the broken, bleeding, and defiled body, and the audience's experience of that pleasure seems rather at odds with religious enlightenment. To place such an emphasis on the body, in a discourse where the body is aligned with all that is fallen, temporal, and damnable, opens up potentially dangerous lines of thought for the audience of *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*.¹ Certainly *Ælfric* himself acknowledged these dangers; as Clare Lees and Gillian Overing have noted, his *Lives* of virgin-martyrs – and particularly of female martyrs – presents considerably less graphic versions of the torture-and-martyrdom scenes than his sources do. Lees and Overing's comparison with the parallel *passiones* in Aldhelm's *De virginitate* clearly demonstrates *Ælfric's* hesitation to place explicit descriptions of disfiguration, dismemberment, and sexual violence before his lay audience.² Yet the violence of martyrdom remains at the centre of these lives; as narratives of hagiography, they depend, in a very literal sense, upon the bodies of the virgin-martyrs, and, as Kathryn Gravdal puts it, "Hagiography affords a sanctioned space in which eroticism can flourish and in which male voyeurism becomes licit, if not advocated."³ The result is an apparent tension between the necessity of graphic carnality and *Ælfric's* desire to shield his audience from it.

It is, of course, much more complicated than that. Shari Horner attempts to resolve this tension by regarding the violated bodies of *Ælfric's* female saints as texts that readers are asked to interpret; as she puts it, "it is only through the display of literal violence that spiritual meaning is achieved."⁴ Following suit, Andrea Rossi-Reder suggests, "These women's bodies represent the land itself ... giving birth to both

Christian and nationalist sentiment among the persons they leave behind.”⁵ Reading the body as text is a powerful tool for understanding the use of graphic violence and intimations of heteronormative sexuality, suggesting that audiences pass through voyeuristic pleasure on the way to spiritual illumination. Lees puts forward a similar argument, suggesting that sexual desire is translated – though perhaps sublimated would be a better word – into religious desire through the representations of sexualized bodies in religious literature.⁶ Yet this methodology reinscribes a dualism between materiality and spirituality that ultimately forces the body itself to retreat from view, just as it does in Ælfric’s redactions of the *passiones*. It is, after all, the body of the saint that grounds the potential for spirituality; it is her bodily suffering that demonstrates her sanctity and makes her a martyr, and it is the remains of that body, in the form of relics, that ground the faith of those who venerate her and assert her continual presence within the Christian community. Although hagiographic texts like Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints* deal in representation rather than material reality, they depend upon the presumed existence of a body or bodies that serve to ground both sanctity and meaning.

The dualism of body and soul takes various forms throughout the western tradition, but especially since Descartes’s *cogito*, it has grounded subjectivity explicitly in the mind, rather than in the material form. As Elizabeth Grosz has argued, western thought has historically placed the mind at the centre of the self, regarding the body as an integral, yet peripheral, component in the formation of the thinking subject.⁷ Yet the recent critical turn towards materiality questions this traditional Cartesian understanding of subjectivity, incorporating developments in the biological sciences to reconsider how subjectivity proceeds from the interactions within and between bodies and their environments.⁸ For Grosz, focusing on the materiality of bodies allows us to examine them in their individual specificity as elements of a system rather than as mere effects of discourse or extensions of an independent self. In what follows, I would like to return the body, and specifically the female body, to its central place in Ælfric’s stories of female martyrdom. Instead of being metaphorical texts in need of spiritual exegesis, these bodies are objectified, sexualized, defiled, and appropriated for and by the audience in hagiographic narratives. Like Lees, I consider these bodies to be vehicles for understanding, but not through a “saintly transcendence” that would allow the martyr to fully renounce her materiality in favour of spiritual meaning.⁹ Rather, female bodies are central to Ælfric’s project of disciplining a masculine Christian identity through his translations for his patrons, Æthelweard and Æthelmær, within their secular aristocratic context. *Lives of Saints*

positions itself at the intersection of ecclesiastical discourses of sanctity and secular discourses of exogamy and exchange, and the materiality of female saints and their suffering both grounds and threatens the nexus of these discourses in complex and fascinating ways. A *passio* needs a body, but female bodies, simultaneously desired and despised, revered and reviled, present certain difficulties for a tenth-century monk and his (mostly male) lay audience. As such, they may tell us something about the perception and valuation of real women's bodies in late Anglo-Saxon England, where the politics of exchange and commodification dominate.

Foundational to this argument is the thesis, put forth by Virginia Burrus in *The Sex Lives of Saints*, that the experience of suffering and martyrdom, as fully embodied, articulates an erotics of the divine. Through the excesses of denial, the saint produces what Burrus calls "counterpleasure": "In and through the extremes not only of self-denial but even of self-mutilation, the ascetic, however ambivalently, pursues both pleasure and desire."¹⁰ Far from denying or overcoming the body, the saint focuses intently on his or her own embodiment. Practices such as fasting and self-flagellation reshape the body; taken to extremes, the tortures of the martyrs produce a *jouissance* that reconfigures subjectivity. Following Elaine Scarry's work about the power of pain to unmake and remake the world of the tortured subject,¹¹ Burrus focuses on torture as a means of breaking down subjectivity in order to replace it with something else. As Scarry notes, the effects of torture can be equivalent to a religious experience, dissolving the world and creating a path to an otherworldly realm,¹² and Burrus argues that, unlike the subjects of political or military torture, saints welcome the breakdown of subjectivity as a means to pursue unity with the divine. She finds that "the agonizing pleasure pursued in eroticism ... *increases* transcendence to the point that the boundaries of individual subjectivity – the distinctions between the "internal" and the "external" – effectively dissolve."¹³ As a result, asceticism, torture, and martyrdom can effect "not a destruction but rather a deconstruction (thus also a reconstruction) of subjectivity."¹⁴ Because they will it, the bodies of saints, both female and male, can absorb acts of violence and degradation and transform them into divine *eros*.¹⁵ The body, and the deeply masochistic pleasure it experiences through torture, is thus the original ground of sanctity; far from being something to overcome, it is a site of resistance to temporal power, and also the very medium by which the saint is able to approach and incorporate divinity. Because bodies are always sexed in cultural terms, the eroticism of male and female saints differs, not only in their experiences of *eros*, but in the social symbolism by which those acts are appropriated through

narrative. Male saints are easily transformed into exemplars of holy living, but, as Burrus puts it, “A ‘woman,’ it seems, must die in order to get a Life.”¹⁶

While Burrus’s formulation of the erotics of sanctity certainly does not account for all sorts of sainthood (particularly those who avoid torture or martyrdom and die at a ripe old age), it explicitly questions received wisdom about the role of the body in Christian tradition, placing not only the body but the experience of eroticism firmly at the centre of a certain type of hagiographic narrative. Embodiment becomes the site of the martyr’s agency; for female saints, it is almost always a passive agency, accepting – even desiring – the tortures that will allow them to unmake and remake their worlds and finally welcoming the death that is the ultimate step in reconstructing their subjectivity. As such, they seek transcendence through, not from, the body, refiguring both the body and its eroticism as holy rather than profane. The saintly body thus becomes the nexus for conflicting ideas about materiality. In Burrus’s analysis, the body, supreme symbol for the fallenness of humankind, becomes the ground upon which sanctified transcendence is practised through the experience of pain and torture. The gender politics of the sexed body further complicates matters since, as R. Howard Bloch argues, patristic thought aligns the divide between masculine and feminine with the divide between salvation and damnation.¹⁷ As a result, holy women are at a disadvantage in their female sex and must overcome their physicality in order to achieve salvation; they must, in short, find a way to become men before they can become saints.¹⁸ In his commentary on Ephesians, for example, Jerome writes, “quamdiu mulier partui servit et liberis, hanc habet ad virum differentiam, quam corpus ad animam. Sin autem Christo magis voluerit servire quam saeculo, mulier esse cessabit, et dicetur vir, quia omnes in perfectum virum cupimus occurrere” [in fact, a woman also possesses this difference in respect to a man which the body has in respect to the soul in the literal sense inasmuch as a woman is devoted to birth and children. If, however, she should wish to be devoted to Christ more than to the world, she will cease to be a woman and be said to be man, because we all desire to attain to the perfect man (Eph. 4:13)].¹⁹ Such a view seems to inform *Lives of Saints*, and Ælfric’s stories of female virgin-martyrs – Eugenia and Basilla, Basilissa, Agnes and Agatha, Lucy, Petronilla and Felicula, Cecilia, and Daria²⁰ – thus negotiate a delicate balance between a patristic denial of the body and the necessity of the body, in both practical and spiritual terms, as a foundation for narrative. In rejecting birth and children, Ælfric’s virgin-martyrs demonstrate both the desire and the determination to refuse the social demands on their bodies and to

pursue lives of spiritual devotion – to attain to the perfect man. Yet they do not deny their bodies per se; as much as they desire the spiritual life, they desire equally the tortures that will allow them, through their bodies, to remake their own subjectivity through an erotic *jouissance* of an explicitly material kind.

Although their bodies may be sites of resistance and self-reconstruction, the virgin-martyrs are still subject to the ideological shaping of authors and audiences. As Robert Mills's work on medieval representations of the body-in-pain has shown, depictions of torture and suffering function polysemously to police social boundaries of individuals and the body politic alike.²¹ Such polysemy is difficult to control, however, as audiences can have differing, and even conflicting, responses to a work of art – responses that may or may not conform to the intentions of its creator. In the hands of an anxious author, therefore, the bodies of female saints are often discreetly hidden from the audience's view, mitigating the power of their self-transformation and their saintly example;²² this is certainly the case with Ælfric's toned-down lives of female martyrs. As Phillip Pulsiano points out, the role of the female body in Anglo-Saxon martyrdom stories is vexed indeed. Of the martyrs treated by Bede, he writes:

Such sadistic scenes can perhaps be viewed as speaking to sublimated male aggression that is forefronted in a preoccupation with the debasement of female sexuality under the guise of chastity tested, finding within these acts an unacknowledged, perhaps even unrecognized, urge to explore the female body – a body that remains mysterious in its alterity – in ways that, if not revealed with consent to the male fantasizing imagination, must be had through violence. It is not, I would argue, simply a matter of seeing such scenes as finally pornographic: to argue that the narratives simply provide licit sites for the privileging of male voyeurism and sexual aggression offers a rather superficial estimate of male readers as brutish and perverse. It is, rather, a matter of possession and subordination, of recoiling from fear of the feminine, of masculine loss, and of a feminine logic that is alien, incomprehensible, and threatening and that thus finds its response in a deep-rooted assault upon the female body.²³

For Bede, Pulsiano argues, it is the sheer alterity, both of the female body and of the subjectivity it represents, that emerges from narratives of female martyrdom. In the process of sexualizing and narrativizing these bodies, an author can reinforce their fundamental difference both from himself and from his male readers. The effect is to turn the subjects of martyrdom into safely contained narrative objects. Pulsiano is concerned with narratives of Anglo-Saxon female saints from the

early conversion period for Bede's primarily male monastic audience, but Elaine Treharne has argued that Ælfric also conceives of his audiences as primarily, if not exclusively, male, even if they are not necessarily monastic, and Pulsiano's observations are equally valid for this later Anglo-Saxon context as well.²⁴ As Treharne shows, Ælfric's general reluctance to engage with women, either as narrative or as pastoral subjects, leads him to reconfigure their representation in his source material, silencing their voices and mitigating their authority as religious models. Like Bede, Ælfric contains his female subjects through the simultaneous assertion of sexual difference and narrative control.

In hagiography, then, torture and martyrdom have the potential for opposing ends; they can function both as opportunities to assert a sanctified subjectivity and as techniques for resubjecting the female body to masculine control. Ælfric's *Lives* deals somewhat uneasily with this tension. Comparing them with Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, Lees and Overing argue that Ælfric's virgin-martyrs stand as exempla of steadfastness in faith rather than of a sublime eroticism; the decreased interest in torture and violence suggests "an increased interest in controlling and defining the female subject and her body in relation to the unfailing will of the idealized Christian subject."²⁵ The difference here turns, once again, on the question of audience. For the nuns of Barking, the world-making power of female martyrdom and the agency it affords could serve as models of sanctity. For an audience such as Æthelweard and Æthelmær, however, the bodies of female martyrs are too bound up with the alterity of feminine subjectivity, and in their text the martyrs are thus universalized as models of Christian subject formation through the practice of chastity, not martyrdom.²⁶ While they may ultimately be abstracted into universal Christian subjects, however, the virgin-martyrs in *Lives of Saints* begin as explicitly gendered narrative objects, and the process by which their bodies recede from view helps to illuminate the relationships between late Anglo-Saxon religious belief and the materiality of its practices, including the experience of reading or hearing about hagiographic narratives. In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to explore the series of narrative turns by which Ælfric creates, exposes, hides, and finally destroys the bodies of his female virgin-martyrs. The saints are highly sexualized and fully embodied through descriptions of the women and the tortures they face, but at the same time, the potential agency of the suffering martyr to rebuild her subjectivity is tempered. For Ælfric's female martyrs are not tortured so much as they are threatened with torture, and because they are ultimately shielded from suffering, their sexed and sexualized bodies remain desirable in both spiritual and physical terms, mitigating the erotics of sanctity that

afford such world-remaking power.²⁷

That the female virgin-martyr is both material and sexualized is a given almost from the beginning of her generally conventional narrative, and the sexual union of husband and wife is an important trope in establishing the scope and nature of the martyr's desire and her chosen identity as a bride of Christ. Agnes, threatened with torture and defilement but shielded from those threats by the God in whom she places her faith, is a typical example. True to form, Agnes rejects worldly riches and marriage to the son of Sempronius, the prefect, preferring chastity as a bride of Christ. Yet her desire is not purely spiritual, and she declares her intention to maintain her virginity in the most sexual of terms. As a result, her characterization of faith is a distinctly physical one:

His ansyn is wlitigre and his lufu wynsumre
his bryd-bedd me is gearo nu iu mid dreamum.
His mædenu me singað mid geswegum stemnum.
Of his muðe ic under-feng meoluc and hunig
nu iu ic eom beclypt mid his clænum earmum
his fægera lichama is minum geferlæht.²⁸

[His form is more beautiful and his love more delightful,
his bridal bed has already been made ready for me now with joys.
His maidens sing to me with harmonious voices.
From his mouth I have received milk and honey,
and already now I am embraced in his pure arms,
his fair body is united with mine.]

Agnes's words draw attention to her sexuality, invoking the beauty of her beloved and the joys of the bridal bed. Her sexuality is not simply metaphorical, but it relies on an intensely material evocation of the conjugal experience: the taste and feel of his mouth and his arms and the union of two bodies. The overt eroticism of her speech testifies to the physical nature of Agnes's desires even as it affirms her commitment to purity, allowing the audience to focus on her as both a model of sanctity and a desirable female body.²⁹ Nor is she the only virgin-martyr to connote sexual and spiritual desire simultaneously; her example inspires Constantia "mid beornendre lufe to þinum brydbedde becomen" [to attain to your {Christ's} bridal bed with burning desire].³⁰ Even Cecilia's conversion of Valerian takes place in the intimate and sexually charged space of the bridal bed.³¹ These moments raise the possibility of sexuality while simultaneously redirecting it towards spiritual ends, but its initial evocation locates the saint firmly

within a gendered and distinctly heterosexualized body.³²

The materiality of the saint's body, and her gender, are further emphasized by the tortures that are set pieces of the *passio*, and it is no coincidence that many of these are specifically sexual in nature. Because of Agnes's commitment to virginity, for example, her punishment consists of being dragged naked through the streets to a brothel, where she will suffer defilement: "Þa het se woda dema hyre wæda of adon / and hi swa nacode gelædan to þam forligres huse / and het clypian geond þa stræt and cyðan be þysum" [Then the enraged judge commanded that her clothes be taken off and that she be led naked to the house of fornication and commanded that this be cried in the streets and made known].³³ Thus, Agnes's body becomes further sexualized: the threat of rape emphasizes the femininity of her body and its socially designated role as the receptacle for masculine desires. The materiality of the punishment stands in contrast to the materiality of the saint's desire for chastity; the holy physical union for which she longs in her speech to Sempronius is inverted and distorted into a profane physical attack. In the same breath, the component of spectacle is introduced into her martyrdom, as her defilement will be magnified by the fact that it will be witnessed by the people in the street. But the spectacle also works on the level of the text's audience, who have the opportunity to envision Agnes's naked body dragged through the public space and brought to defilement and degradation in the brothel. This opportunity may be intended to lead to a deeper spiritual understanding, but it is not without enjoyment at the literal level as well. In this moment, the male audience of the *passio* seems to be aligned with the pagan crowds observing the spectacle of the martyr's body rather than with the saintly heroine herself.

At the very moment that the text raises this possibility, however, it also takes it away:

Hwæt ða godes miht mycclum wearð geswutelod
swa þæt þæs mædenes fex befeng hi eall abutan
sona swa þa cwelleras hire claðas of abrudon
and þæt fex hi behelede on ælce healfe gelice.
Hi tugon ða þæt mæden to þæra myltestrena huse
ac heo gemette þær sona scinende godes encgel
swa þæt nan man ne mihte for ðam mycclum leohte
hire on beseon oððe hi hreppan.³⁴

[But lo, the power of God was greatly made clear,
so that the maiden's hair covered her all about

as soon as the killers removed her clothes
and the hair concealed her on both sides alike.
Then they dragged that maiden to the brothel
but she immediately encountered there a shining angel of God,
so that no man could look at her or touch her,
because of the great light.]

The projected sexual torments are never fulfilled; Agnes's body is shielded, both from the unwanted gaze of the pagan crowds and from the unwanted touch of the would-be rapists, and her naked, defiled body exists only in the audience's imagination. Deterred, but not defeated, the authorities command her to be burned, finding only that fire, too, cannot touch her. God has thus preserved Agnes by thwarting the base desires of her persecutors, but God has thwarted Agnes's desires as well. In both cases, the promised tortures – and the agony and the ecstasy that would allow the saint to remake her world – fail to transpire. The saint's body cannot become a site for the reformation of Christian subjectivity through erotic communion with the divine; Agnes's desire for a physical union with her heavenly bridegroom is sublimated into the metaphorical spiritual union between Christ and the Church. Agnes is finally dispatched by the sword, “and crist hi ða underfeng for his naman gemartyrode” [and Christ received her then, martyred for his name].³⁵ She ultimately joins Christ, but in spirit rather than in body. Her body has been sexualized through its initial desirability, its erotic longing for the divine, and its threatened torture by rape, but its potential to catalyse subject formation through torture remains unfulfilled. The experience of the audience in some ways parallels Agnes's; the desire for spectacle, raised by the words of the *passio* and to some extent realized in the imagined scenes of violation, is ultimately repressed by the course of the narrative. Both the female body and the sinful desires it precipitates are contained by the *passio*, and the audience, rather than Agnes, experiences a kind of suffering as a result. Ælfric's audience can thus participate, to a certain extent, in the paradoxical eroticism that underwrites sanctity, revelling both in their own contemplation of the virginal body and in the necessity of its denial. The pleasure of desire, and the pain of its frustration, work together to help the audience, rather than the saint, create communion with the divine. The martyrdom narratives of female virgins, then, are not merely sadistic, as Pulsiano pointed out; they are deeply masochistic as well.

It is significant, then, that Agnes's torture takes the form of sexual defilement, and she is not the only saint whose persecution includes the threat of rape – a threat that emphasizes the saints' femininity along

with their sexuality. Daria is sent “to myltestrena huse þam manfullan to gamene / ac god hi gescylde wið þa sceandlican hæðenan” [to the house of prostitutes as sport for the wicked, but God protected her against the obscene heathens].³⁶ Lucy’s fate is similar: threatened with the brothel, she finds herself held fast by the Holy Spirit, so that her persecutors must hitch a pair of oxen to her hands in an attempt to drag her away – to no avail. Like Agnes, Lucy finally dies by the sword, “gewundod þæt hire wand se innoð ut” [wounded so that her insides slipped out].³⁷ In each of these tales (Agnes’s and Lucy’s more dramatically so than Daria’s), the narrative of threatened defilement focuses the audience’s attention on a promised spectacle of rape that never transpires. This is a form of torture specific to the female martyrs of Ælfric’s collection; while male martyrs, for example, Chrysanthus, must withstand the temptations of sex, they are not threatened with rape. For a male saint to face a roomful of beautiful, willing women is tempting, even titillating for the audience, but his temptation is a far cry from the young woman who will be forced, not tempted, into sex.³⁸ For a man, virginity must be defended against an internal threat: the man’s own carnal desires. In conquering and repressing those desires, the man achieves sanctity. His struggle against his own desires parallels precisely the experience of Ælfric’s male readers, who face the internal threat of sinfulness, rather than the external threat of torture, and achieve Christian subjectivity through its necessary repression or expiation. For a woman, however, maintaining her virginity means facing a threat from the outside, and that threat is both constantly present and completely beyond her control.³⁹ Moreover, it is a threat that pursues women into tenth-century England just as it threatened them in late Antique Rome.

Early Christian theology seems to have acknowledged this difference, and Augustine reminds us:

sanctumque corpus usu fieri sanctae uoluntatis, qua inconcussa ac stabili permanente, quidquid aliud de corpore uel in corpore fecerit, quod sine peccato proprio non ualeat euitari, praeter culpam esse patientis. Sed quia non solum quod ad dolorem, uerum etiam quod ad libidinem pertinet, in corpore alieno perpetrari potest: quidquid tale factum fuerit, etsi retentam constantissimo animo pudicitiam non excutit.

[that the body is made holy by the exercise of a holy will; and that, while this will remains unshaken and steadfast, nothing that another does with the body, or in the body, that the sufferer has no power to avert without sinning in turn, is the fault of the sufferer. Not only the infliction of pain, but also the gratification of lust, is possible upon the body of another; but when anything of this kind is done, the chastity to

which the most resolute soul holds fast is not struck down.][⁴⁰

Ælfric himself reinforces this idea in one of Lucy's speeches to Paschasius:

ne bið ænig gewemmed
lichama to plihthe gif hit ne licað þam mode.
Þeah þu mine hand ahebbe to ðinum hæþengilde
and swa þurh me geoffrige mines unwilles
ic beo þeah unscyldig ætforan ðam soðan gode
seþe demð be þam willan and wat ealle þincg
gif þu me unwilles gewemman nu dest
me bið twifeald clænnysse geteald to wuldre.
Ne miht þu gebigan minne willan to þe
swa hwæt swa þu minum lichaman dest
ne mæg þæt belimpan to me.⁴¹

[no one's body is
dangerously polluted if her mind does not like it.
Although you raise my hand to your heathen idol
and so make an offering through me against my will,
I am innocent before the true God,
he who judges by the will and knows all things.
If you now cause me to be polluted against my will,
a twofold purity will be given to me as an honor.
You cannot bend my will to you, whatever you do to my body,
nor can that happen to me.]

In Lucy's speech, Ælfric affirms volition as a crucial component of virginity. Yet Augustine's was clearly the minority opinion in both late Antiquity and the Middle Ages; other patristic doctrines advocated suicide to prevent rape, and stories of women heroically preferring death to defilement abounded throughout the early medieval period.⁴² For them, purity of soul clearly was inseparable from purity of body, and there was no difference between the soul's volition and bodily experience. Although Ælfric nominally espouses the Augustinian ideal, then, the fact remains that in each case of martyrdom, the virgin receives divine protection, and the threat of defilement remains just that – only a threat. The virgin body preserves both its purity and its integrity, reinforcing the text's focus on a body that is undeniably and irretrievably female, however saintly it may be. While the saint may also exemplify steadfastness in faith, her bodily purity matters a great

deal for Ælfric and his audience.

Agatha's martyrdom is a case in point, as it deals precisely with the difference between defilement of the body and degradation of the soul. Rejected as a suitor by the saint, the evil Quintianus sends Agatha to the aptly named Aphrodosia, "þæt heo geond þrittig nihte hire þeawas leornode / and hire mod awende þurh þæra myltestrena forspennincgæ" [so that she might, for thirty nights, learn her ways and pervert her mind through the evil attractions of the prostitutes].⁴³ Agatha's sexual education, or perversion, is meant here not simply to defile the virgin body; that could be attempted by sheer brute force and, following Augustine, would not in any case compromise her chastity. Rather, Quintianus seeks to defile or *awendan* her mind, so that Agatha's exposure to the prostitutes functions as temptation to accept sexuality rather than as a threat of rape – the volition necessary to overcome spiritual virginity. Refusing such temptation, Agatha earns for herself a more painful, but equally sexualized, form of torture: she is stretched out on the rack and her breast is cut off. What sets Agatha's story apart is the fact that many of the tortures envisioned by the audience come, in fact, from the saint herself. Desiring fervently to suffer martyrdom, Agatha offers her persecutors suggestions about how they could mutilate her body:

Gif ðu mid wild-deorum me nu bætan wylt
hi beoð sona hand-tame þurh þæs hælendes naman.
Gif þu me fyr gearcost me cymð fær-lice of heofonum
halwendlic deaw þurh drihtnes ængelas.
Gif ðu me swingla behætst ic hæbbe þone halgan gast
þurh ðone ic forseo ealle þine swingla.⁴⁴

[If you wish to set upon me with wild animals,
they will immediately be submissive to handling through the name of the
Savior.

If you prepare a fire for me, a wholesome dew will come suddenly
from heaven through the angels of the Lord.

If you threaten me with scourging, I have the Holy Spirit,
through whom I will scorn all blows.]

In each case, the pain intended by the tortures is converted to pleasure: wild animals will become tame and fire will call forth cooling waters. Agatha's rhetorical transformation of pain into pleasure subverts her persecutors, but it also evinces the transformative power of the saint under duress and effects her ultimate consummation. The pain of torture does not cleanse or purify; instead, it unmakes the

saint's world and dissolves the boundary between herself and the divine. Agatha's own enthusiasm for the tortures she may face sets a list of horrifying possibilities before the audience for their delectation, and she herself relishes the tortures even as she experiences them, knowing that the goal of the torture will be subverted through her faith.⁴⁵ Her impassioned longing for torture echoes, in its tone, Agnes's description of a conjugal union with Christ; in both cases, the saint desires an embodied physical experience in order to approach the divine. As Agatha says, "Ne mæg min sawl beon gebroht mid blysse to heofonum / butan min lichama beo on þinum bendum genyrwod" [My soul cannot be brought with joy to heaven unless my body is oppressed in your bonds].⁴⁶ The tortures she desires and delineates are an expression of eroticism in precisely the same way as Agnes's fantasy of a heavenly bridegroom is. And the goal of that eroticism is a unity with God that is achieved through, not in spite of, materiality.

Unlike Agnes or Lucy, Agatha actually undergoes torture: her body is stretched on the rack and her breast is cut off. Even as her body undergoes physical dissolution, however, Agatha remakes both her body and her world, declaring "ic habbe min breost on minre sawle ansunde" [I have my breast whole in my soul] after it has been cut off.⁴⁷ The wholeness of her breast is not merely spiritual, however: divine intervention restores the lost breast to her physical form as well. When God sends an apostle to make her broken body whole again, Agatha's reconstructed self is made manifest in her reconstructed body; her miraculous healing testifies to her own power to generate subjectivity through the mechanism of torture.⁴⁸ For the audience of the text, however, Agatha's healing also erases the signs of her sanctity. No wound, scar, or other visible sign remains to function as a marker of the transformative power of her suffering. For the readers of *Lives of Saints*, it is the threat to the saint's clean and proper body – the integrity of her material form – that makes her a martyr, a fitting sacrifice in Christ's name. Yet it is equally important that her physical integrity ultimately be preserved. The divine healing of Agatha's mutilated breast provides her once more with a whole and beautiful body, grounding sanctity firmly in the intact virginal body rather than in the potent agency that willingly accepted torture. Similarly, the averted-rape martyrdom offers to the audience female bodies that are highly sexualized by a rape that never occurs, but that nonetheless codes these bodies as desirable. What, then, is the purpose of these bodies that are defiled yet kept pure, tortured yet made whole again? How does the centrality of the saints' bodies, to the exclusion of their agency, serve the needs of Ælfric's reading audience?

The answer is twofold. First, it is possible to see, in the fleeting

images of Agatha's mutilated body (and to a lesser extent in the naked bodies of Agnes, Lucy, and Daria in the brothels), the feminine bearing the sinful desires of a Christian community: desires for sex and violence that are acknowledged, entertained, and ideally expiated by these narratives. The imaginary defilement of holy bodies thus serves as a locus for the abjection of all that is inconsistent with a Christian community, and suffering abjection is part of what makes these women martyrs. Abjection is a means of defining the boundaries of culture by separating the clean from the unclean.⁴⁹ As object, these bodies act as the social repository of sex and violence with the promise of expiating such sins from the community – the audience – that originally bears them. Thus, the physical mutilation of the female body in narratives of martyrdom polices the boundaries of the Christian community by condensing abjection into the representation of the feminine.

At the same time, however, the overt sexualization of these bodies keeps them solidly within the structures of meaning that underwrite social relations, persistently and continually marked as female. Virgin bodies bear a special cultural weight in these contexts; the premium placed on virginity in both the marriage market and in Christian theology makes this category of sexuality the primary basis for a woman's identity. It is not difficult to see why virginity enjoys the primacy that it does. As Luce Irigaray has noted, "*The virginal woman ... is pure exchange value*. She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist: she is a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange. In this sense, her natural body disappears into its representative function."⁵⁰ Representative, perhaps, but not immaterial: for Irigaray, the virginal woman has substance, but not subjectivity. The virgin body is wholly dependent on its material integrity. Virginity is guaranteed by an intact hymen, and physical purity, while it can symbolize spiritual purity as well, must be, first and foremost, physical – hence the insistence of the Marian apocrypha, for instance, that Mary's hymen remained intact not only after Christ's conception, but also after his birth.⁵¹ In a secular context, the virgin bride guarantees the purity of her husband's line, making her a more valuable commodity; this value is, at least in part, why the Anglo-Saxon laws doubled the fine for rape if the victim was a virgin.⁵²

The virgin saint, according to Jerome, puts aside her femininity to "become male" and focus solely on Christ.⁵³ Yet, as Burrus reminds us, it is crucial for hagiographic narratives that martyrs be fully embodied in order to achieve sanctity through the erotics of suffering, and they cannot be embodied without also being gendered. The virgin-martyr's devotion to Christ, far from erasing her physicality, actually emphasizes

her embodiment. At the same time, however, it continually reinscribes femininity in its most sexualized – and, to a lay audience, marketable – form. These particular *Lives* surround the potential agency of the female martyr with a double structure of containment: Ælfric’s less graphic torture scenes forgo the extended suffering that would allow for an erotics of sanctity, and they also cast the martyr as reassuringly objectified by her undeniable femininity. Deferred or deflected tortures are a part of Ælfric’s source material as well, where they likewise frustrate the saint’s desire for physical communion with the divine. For the lay audience of *Lives of Saints*, however, the eroticism of martyrdom takes on new meanings when caught between the discourses of ecclesiastical sanctity, where materiality can mark the passion of faith, and the secular marriage market, where female bodies are valued as bearers of a lineage. Far from emphasizing the potential power of their materiality to effect an erotics of sanctity, Ælfric’s *passiones* use the trope of embodiment to emphasize their subordination to masculine desire – and not necessarily sexual desire – as a medium of exchange.

Although the limitations of space prohibit a thorough comparison in this chapter, I would like to suggest that it becomes necessary, in these narratives of female martyrdom, for the martyrs to retain their sexuality in a way that simply does not apply to male saints. Virginity is important for male saints, of course, and the mutilation of their bodies can serve a similar function of simultaneous enjoyment and expiation, for both the audience and the saints themselves. When Julian resurrects a dead man, for example, the man exclaims “*hu clæne mægð-had is on þisum mæran iuliane*” [what pure virginity is in this noble Julian],⁵⁴ and the male martyrs certainly suffer tortures as gruesome as any of those inflicted on their female counterparts – and they suffer them cheerfully. The potential homoeroticism of Sebastian’s body stuck full of arrows, or of Edmund’s bristling with Viking javelins, could certainly be read as implicitly sexualizing these saints. But the overtly sexual nature of female martyrdom, coupled with the text’s insistence on the physical integrity of the saints even after torture, serves to underscore the value of women’s abstracted, sexualized bodies as a means of exchange. Virginity – and dying in its defence – is the primary road to sainthood for women; while Ælfric’s male saints are identified as *episcopus*, *martyr*, *abbas*, *evangelista*, *apostolus*, *confessor*, and even, in a few cases, *rex*, female saints, even when they are queens or martyrs, are designated simply *virgo* – a designation that never appears in the rubrics for the male *vitae*.⁵⁵ Purity, in an explicitly sexual sense, is thus the primary component of female sanctity, and this seems to hold true even for female saints who do not necessarily suffer the kinds of violent torture discussed above: for example, Eugenia, the holy transvestite, is

sexualized in that her attractiveness cannot be disguised by her masculine clothing and proves troubling, as she remains an object of desire and lust within her celibate community.⁵⁶ Their agency consists in refusing to participate as objects in the marriage exchanges that cement community relationships; yet I would submit that, as narrative objects in *Lives of Saints*, they continue to function as commodities on which the Christian community of the hagiographic audience is built – not merely as models of sanctity for the faithful Christian.

Prima facie, these saintly women have accomplished something truly heroic in their determination to defy family, friends, and social convention; to refuse the marriages that are expected of them; and to remove themselves from the control of their temporal masters, such as parents and husbands, by giving themselves to Christ. Perhaps most important, they reclaim dominion over their own bodies, removing them from the market of exchange that would allow them to create social bonds between the men in their communities. This refusal to accept their place as commodities in the marriage market is encouraging to a feminist reading of *Lives of Saints*, offering examples of women – albeit fictional ones – who follow the paths they have chosen for themselves rather than the ones assigned to them by a patriarchal society.⁵⁷ The martyr's refusal to marry and reproduce is not just a rejection of an unwanted suitor; it refutes an entire social structure predicated on the exchangeable virginal body. Nor need the virgin pursue her refusal unto death for her resistance to powerfully disrupt her community. Medieval women like Christina of Markyate modelled themselves on the early Roman martyrs, scorning marriage and suffering the “martyrdom” of their families’ anger before escaping to hermitage or nunnery.⁵⁸ As the influential work of Claude Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated, exogamy and the exchange of women are the very preconditions of culture throughout western history.⁵⁹ The implications of this for real women are well known to feminist critics; nearly four decades ago, Gayle Rubin explained how the traditional exogamic kinship structures that underwrite patriarchy operate through an institutionalized asymmetry of men and women, barring women not only from social power but even from personal agency and, ultimately, from their own bodies.⁶⁰ When women's bodies function as objects of exchange, women become commodities, alienated from themselves and more or less interchangeable.⁶¹ As a result, explains Irigaray, “a commodity – a woman – is divided into two irreconcilable ‘bodies’: her ‘natural’ body and her socially valued, exchangeable body.”⁶² Both the natural body and the exchangeable body remain material; at no point does one or the other become abstracted from its materiality, and these bodies are the very basis of community. Indeed, the woman's body

must remain material in order to be exchangeable; but the body becomes an empty cipher, a unit of exchange, on a market in which women can function only as objects, never as subjects.

This logic of exchange is familiar to students of Old English literature from the seemingly ubiquitous figure of the *friðowebbe*, or peaceweaver, the woman given in marriage to ensure peace between two families.⁶³ It is a notion far removed from the immediate context of vernacular hagiography, but it is also one of those terms that have influenced our understanding of Old English literature out of all proportion to its actual presence within the texts. According to its logic, then, women (or women's bodies) are exchanged by men to form bonds between men; families and kinship groups – and therefore social life in general – are thus predicated on bonds that run between men through women's bodies: father to son, brother to brother, nephew to maternal uncle, father-in-law to son-in-law, and so on. The very fabric of society depends on the exchangeability of the female body, and that exchange can bear spiritual as well as social fruit. Bede, for example, views Edwin's marriage to Æthelburh as weaving a bond not only between the people of Northumbria and the people of Kent, but also between the people of Northumbria and the Christian God.⁶⁴ According to Bede, the bishop Paulinus accompanies Æthelburh from Kent, "outwardly bringing her to her marriage according to the flesh." But this physical union is also the pretext for the conversion of Northumbria, and both Æthelburh and the word of God are "pure virgin[s] to be espoused to one husband."⁶⁵ It is the fruit of this carnal union, the birth of Eanflæd, that ultimately convinces Edwin to convert to Christianity; his infant daughter is consecrated to God as a pledge to convert if God grants him victory in battle. The conversion of Northumbria, then, depends on the exchangeability, between men as well as between men and God, of the virgin bodies of Æthelburh and Eanflæd. Although they are not martyrs, Bede's deployment of these bodies (and of other noble female bodies throughout the *Historia ecclesiastica*) shows them bearing spiritual relations in much the same way that they bear social relations: weaving peace between the English and God.⁶⁶

The virgin's body thus matters in complex ways in her *passio*, grafting sexual desire onto the drive towards social and economic stability that underwrites marriage exchanges. While her virginity is ostensibly a marker of her profound faith, it also makes her a valuable commodity on the marriage market; when coupled with the beauty and wisdom that are generic hallmarks of the martyr's character, virginity makes her both sexually and socially desirable. Her pure and "ungewemmed" body clearly functions as a commodity for her family to exchange. Lucy, for example, states the case most plainly after

making her own pledge of virginity:

Nu bidde ic þe þurh þa ylcan þe þe mid gebedum gehælde
þæt þu nanne bryd-guman næfre me ne namige
ne of minum lichaman deadlicne wæstm ne sece
ac þa ðing þe þu woldest to gewemmednysse me syllan
*forgif me ða to clænnysse to criste farendre.*⁶⁷

[Now I ask you, through the same one who healed you through prayers,
that you never name any bridegroom for me
nor expect any mortal fruit from my body,
but those things which you would give me for my pollution,
give me them for my purity as I go to Christ.]

The commodification of Lucy's virginity is a given within the text; the property that would have passed to Lucy on her marriage is understood by the martyr as a payment for her "gewemmednysse" [pollution]. Virginity does not, as Jerome would have it, make the martyr less of a woman and more like a man; if anything, it emphasizes her femininity by marking her as the object of a male sexual desire more akin to commodity fetishism than to classic lust. She is sought after as a marriage partner, not just a sex partner, and this distinction means that she must possess wisdom, beauty, and social standing along with virginity. Of Agnes, Ælfric writes, "Heo wæs wlitig on ansyne and wlitigre on geleafan. / Þa ða heo gewende of scole ða awogode hi sum cniht" [She was beautiful in her countenance, and more beautiful in her faith. When she returned from school, a certain youth wooed her].⁶⁸ Agnes's beauty and education, as well as her noble birth, make her desirable to Sempronius's son. Agatha's wisdom and purity similarly draw the attentions of Quintianus,⁶⁹ while Petronilla's fair face inflames the passions of Flaccus,⁷⁰ and, in an interesting reversal, Daria's beauty, along with her cultivated speech, plays no small role in Chrysanthus's desire to convert her.⁷¹ These women and girls function as objects of a masculine gaze trained on them by both suitors and readers; in them, noblemen such as Æthelweard and Æthelmaer might easily have recognized their own mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters, along with the social and economic relationships for which they depended upon these women and their exchangeable, interchangeable bodies. In *Lives of Saints*, however, the acknowledgment of the virgin's desirability, in the form of the dreaded marriage proposal, becomes the necessary catalyst for her steadfast resistance. Without the threat of impending marriage, the martyr's virginity is not in jeopardy. It is because of her sexuality – because she is young, beautiful, wise, and, most important,

virginal – that she can serve the didactic function of the *passio* from the outset.

When women refuse to be exchanged, as the virgin-martyrs invariably do, the result is social chaos within the context of the story, a necessary pretext for the martyr's torture and eventual death. The process of torture and martyrdom, however, as it plays out in Ælfric's *Lives*, reinscribes the social values of femininity and masculine dominance over the potential eroticism of martyrdom. Ælfric's martyr does not remake her own subjectivity and fulfil her erotic desire for physical transcendence; instead, she becomes subject to narrative convention and the politics of social exchange. By giving their bodies to Christ, the virgin-martyrs seem to thwart their gender-determined social roles. Yet by becoming spectacles, both within the narratives and for their audiences, the virgin female bodies uphold the masculine authority that undergirds those original conditions of exchange: their socially valued material bodies serve the same purpose, only in a different context, weaving peace between Ælfric's male patrons and their equally masculine God. This is not to say that Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* was read exclusively by male audiences invested in upholding traditional patriarchal social structures. Certainly, it would have been possible for readers, both male and female, to see in these virgin-martyrs models of a potentially subversive agency. But the texts are clearly designed to minimize this potential. Ælfric's reluctance to engage with the erotics of sanctity inherent in narratives of martyrdom is of a piece with his general reticence about placing the more subtle aspects of Christian theology before a lay audience. The result is a set of texts poised provocatively between the potent and dramatic agency of the early Christian martyrs and the political necessities of late Anglo-Saxon secular life.

It is, I suspect, the dual (but not dualistic) nature of the female body in such social economies – the natural body and the socially valued body – that allows the female martyr to be at once a site of abjection from the community and a locus for relationships of exchange within the community or between the community and God. When the Christian audience abjects the natural female body and the sinful desires it occasions, that body paradoxically defines the borders between the sacred and the profane. Yet the socially valued body remains to serve as the foundation of cultural meaning and to link a patriarchal community with a masculine deity. In this way, it is possible to think of the female saints as heavenly bodies in a double sense; they are simultaneously the beautiful, nubile, virginal objects of masculine heterosexual desire and the alienated, meaning-making bodies of social exchange. As such, they give licence to the

contemplation of rape, torture, mutilation, and death in the service of a stronger faith in Christ. At the same time, they reinforce the gender hierarchies of their lay audiences, emphasizing the materiality of the female body and its subjection to masculine dominance, even in martyrdom. Moreover, these sanctified and commodified bodies continue to reinforce a masculine Christian community identity far beyond their martyrdoms in their afterlives as both material relics and narrative objects. As a result, the female martyrs of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* do not threaten the social stability of late tenth-century England with the power of their own world-making agency. Instead, they remind audiences of women's place in the various hierarchies of social exchange by focusing attention on their highly sexualized, fully feminine, and wholly material bodies.

12 “Torture me, rend me, burn me, kill me!” Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Depiction of Female Sanctity

ROSALIND LOVE

At a conservative estimate we can muster the names of some forty female saints from Anglo-Saxon England, but it is remarkable that not only do many of them crowd into the seventh century or so, but also, in the majority of cases, the earliest surviving attempt to provide a written account of their claim to sanctity – a hagiography – dates from the eleventh century or later.¹ That period was in any case the most productive for Latin hagiography in England, and it was most definitely so for the hagiography of female saints.² Some theories have been advanced to account for the new and powerful impulse towards the composition of Lives in Latin, both in terms of some local hesitation about putting into writing the legends of the home-grown holy men and women of England, and also – to view the matter from the other side – with an eye to the need for some degree of cultural assimilation, or the desire on the part of individual communities to assert control over relics and cult, and thereby over territory, in the second half of the century and beyond.³ My concern in this chapter is less with tackling those possibly unanswerable questions than with considering how those women were presented when they did finally emerge into the literature. In most cases it is beyond recovery to determine the historical reality of their lives, but then anybody who deals with hagiography should know full well that it tends to tell us far more about the hagiographer’s times and attitudes than about the saint in question. The literary treatment of female sanctity in Anglo-Saxon England has lately begun to attract more focused scholarly attention: witness, for example, published translations of the Old English lives of the female saints, most recently by Robert Upchurch.⁴ Most of the women celebrated in Old English Lives were martyrs and holy women from long ago and far away. That is not to deny that the narrative choices made by the authors who wrote about them in Old English are of great interest and profoundly instructive about the expectations of the intended audience. But what of the Anglo-Saxons’ own home-grown saints? Moreover, the status and role of women, as portrayed in hagiography, has been the subject of extensive monographs, such as those of Jane Tibbetts Schulenberg or the insightful work of Jocelyn

Wogan-Browne and from the same year Clare Lees and Gillian Overing's *Double Agents*.⁵ Yet what becomes evident from reading such monographs is that the surviving Latin hagiographies of Anglo-Saxon women, with some notable exceptions thanks to the work of scholars like Stephanie Hollis, remain less accessible and thus still less familiar in a detailed way. Hence, the focus in this chapter will be on those eleventh-century Latin hagiographies, and upon some of the narrative choices which informed a depiction of sanctity intended to speak eloquently to the unseen audience.

My ridiculous eye-catcher title translates a phrase from the *Life of Mildreth of Minster-in-Thanet*, written in the early 1090s for St Augustine's, Canterbury (which held her relics), by Goscelin, the Flemish hagiographer.⁶ Sufficient for present purposes should be a swift sketch of that prolific author: he came to England from the monastery of Saint-Bertin at St-Omer in about 1062, apparently at the invitation of Herman, who was returning from exile at Saint-Bertin to his episcopal see at Sherborne.⁷ By the time of his arrival Goscelin had probably already begun to acquire a reputation for learning as well as some experience in the field of hagiography, which was quickly put to use in the service of the Anglo-Saxon saints. He composed some thirty texts about twenty saints, nearly half of them women, which puts him firmly at the forefront of any consideration of female sanctity and its depiction.⁸ After his patron Herman's death in 1078, Goscelin spent over ten years in peripatetic exile, moving from monastery to monastery, earning his keep and seeking patronage with his saints' Lives. He finally settled at St Augustine's, Canterbury, in about 1090 and may well have lived on for nearly twenty years. Now to return to his *Life of Mildreth*.

Goscelin placed my title's exclamation – “Torque, lania, incende, eneca!” – on Mildreth's lips in the face of a threat to her virginity. The tale he spun has an almost comic quality. The *Vita* begins with a long digressive genealogy placing Mildreth as great-great-granddaughter of Æthelbert, king of Kent, through her mother, whom Goscelin calls Domneva (a Latinization of Domne Eafe, that is, the Lady Æbbe, also known as Eormenburh), daughter of Eormenred, king of Kent.⁹ As was fashionable among the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy at the time, Mildreth's mother sent her to Chelles in France for a monastic education. As the story goes, the abbess there rejoiced in the name Wilcoma – “Bene venias,” as Goscelin renders it.¹⁰ Although initially introduced as worthy enough (“powerful by descent and in wealth ... highly educated in letters”),¹¹ Wilcoma chooses to foster the ignoble desires of a young male relative, who, at the devil's prompting, wishes to have Mildreth for himself:

Hunc temptator in amorem uirginis accendit et his flammis, hoc ariete, arcem Dei impetit. Amator, et per se et per amicos eius, conubia non mediocriter petit: possessiones, oppida, castella, familias, thesauros rerum, diuitias et honores Francie in dotem proponit. Sed abbatisa acrior insurgit: ea uero tota uesania huic amatam adiungere contendit, ea precibus, blanditiis, donis et promissionibus infinitis puellam occupat, gloriam mundi insibilat, uiros illustres, matronas nobiles, sorores simplices, quasi auctoritate ecclesie uerendas, in nuptiarum suadelam concitat, immotamque minis ac terroribus arietat. Ipsum etiam episcopum uel fautorem uel consentaneum apparat. Quas autem illecebras, que incitamenta que ferrea corda domarent non dixit? ¹²

That such lust *and* its encouragement are the deliberate work of the devil Goscelin makes very plain – both here, with the use of the term *temptator*, and in the vivid passage which immediately precedes it, where Goscelin states that Mildreth’s success in her monastic training made the devil smart to be thus ground under a girl’s heel, so that he marshalled for himself “Pharaonic horse-and-chariots and Babylonian machinations, that is, fickle and lubricious minds” to attack her.¹³ Predictably, then, the virgin spurns the youth’s advances, but it is not the suitor who is Mildreth’s problem, so much as it is the thwarted abbess, Wilcoma. For her own purposes, she wished to urge the match: with characteristic verbosity Goscelin presses the point. He gives Wilcoma a speech in which, preposterously, she quotes the Pauline tag, “better to marry than burn” (1 Cor. 7:9). To no avail: for the saint, Wilcoma’s empty strivings are like the Siren’s deathly call and frogs’ foul croaking.¹⁴

Mildreth vents her indignation at the perversion of roles she is confronted with, a “doctrix castimoniae et dux uirginum” [teacher of chastity and head of the virgins] urging corruption of that very virtue. She concludes, “torque, lania, incende, eneca: non potero separari a Christi caritate et sibi decretam pudicitiam prodere” [torture, rend, burn, kill: I shall not be separated from the love of Christ and betray the chastity vowed to Him; quoting Romans 8:39]. Then Wilcoma’s transformation into one of the pagan persecutors of the early martyrs is complete: she is an “inflammata tyranna.” The gloves are off. Wilcoma calls Mildreth all the names under the sun: she-anti-Christ [anti-Christam], bride of Christ turned adulteress of Christ. She cites scriptural verses about obedience to authority, and then she gets physical:

Deinde insequitur suppliciis, cedibus, uerberibus, iterumque lenimentis, precibus uel horrendis diuine uirtutis, ut adquiescat, adiurationibus. Que tandem constantia, que fides martyrum a tanti nominis maiestate

impulsa non nutaret, cum carnifices et mortes non timeret. O certamen durius cum Christiana auctoritate, quam cum Neroniana impietate. Nam ab idolatra occidi propter Christum certissimum est premium: Christiano uero contraria urgente per Christum, quo erit euadendum ... Itaque adamantina duritia insuperabilior existit, et ut rupes uasta resistit. Vtque quondam pretiosa martyr Lucia a mille hominibus et mille boum paribus ad lupanar trahentibus moueri non poterat corpore, sic Spiritus Sancti domicilium Mildritha immobilis perstat mente.¹⁵

If the theme still escapes his audience, Goscelin now writes in large letters by referring to the martyrs' faith, to "Neroniana impietas," and finally compares Mildreth to Lucy, condemned to the brothel in her *Passio*.¹⁶

Very striking here is the fact that Wilcoma, a female figure and moreover a figure of ecclesiastical authority, assumes the attributes of the persecuting pagan, rather than the male suitor, to whom Goscelin does not make any further reference in the narrative after his introduction at the start of the passage quoted above. The effect is to distance the virginal saint from any direct contact with the male suitor and maybe to tone down the directly sexual dimension of the persecution. It is also worth interjecting David Townsend's suggestion that the irony of Mildreth's persecution by her own abbess may have been appreciated by Goscelin's audience at St Augustine's, Canterbury, in the early 1090s.¹⁷ The composition of the text, addressed explicitly to *karissimi mei*, later glossed as "uobis domesticis a Deo date domine dilectoribus,"¹⁸ came hard on the heels of a rebellion against the Norman abbot Wido, who had been imposed on the monks of St Augustine's by Lanfranc in 1087.¹⁹ The uprising came to a head in 1089 with Wido's ejection from the monastery, but it was briskly squashed by the expulsion of the original rump of St Augustine's inmates, to be replaced by monks from nearby Christ Church and elsewhere. Some have suggested that Goscelin may have been part of that new influx.²⁰ It is very tempting to imagine that, by dwelling upon a demonically inspired abbess who uses her very status of authority – and even the authority of scripture – to oppress the innocent victim and force blind obedience, the hagiographer was confident of a sympathetic response from an audience only too well aware of the power of elected authority.

To return to the fray at Chelles: angered at Mildreth's obduracy, Wilcoma orders her to be thrust into a furnace. This scene gives Goscelin ample opportunity for his characteristic figurative style:

Astat hostia Domini inuictissima, que, uirginitatem uite et exitium matrimonio preponens, optionemque in triumphum uertens, mox in

mediam candentis clibani uoraginem contruditur. Tum, ore fornacis attentius obstructo, omnis uapor intrinsecus constringitur, ut truci in extinguendam animam animetur. Verum in protectione Dei celi et in umbra alarum Domini sperantibus omnis malorum conatus inanescit. Nullus omnino ardor, nullus estus eam tetigit, sicut nulla libido maculauit. Quid enim materialia incendia in illam possent, aduersus quam incentiua uitiorum et porte inferi non preualebant, mira uero Dei gratia pene eam formidabant contingere, quas ipsa non formidabat pro Domino perferre, quas et interrita ipsa magis uisa est abstertere. Fremebant undique flagrantis rogi in obstrusa cauerna, illa uelut forenses turbines ridebat in aula tranquilla. Ambiebant lucentes facule Dominam serena reuerentia, et lumina sua non tormenta, splendorem suum non terrorem ministrabat flamma, atque in obstructo ergastulo diem reddiderunt incendia. Thalamus uirgini fit fornax torrida, tentorium apricum domus ignita, prunarum area quasi rosarum atria.²¹

This prompts an explicit reference to what will already no doubt have been in the audience's mind: amid the flames, Mildreth burst out with the Song of the Three Boys (Dan. 3:51–90), thus joining the company of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace in Babylon. Goscelin precedes that with a comparison to Daniel in the lions' den and follows it with a reference to Agnes, who by prayer cooled the flames of her pyre.²²

After three hours Mildreth emerges miraculously unharmed, refined by the fire and still singing. Goscelin provides the lovely simile of the dawn rising from a saffron-yellow couch, one of a sumptuous sequence of images emphasizing the virgin's desirable beauty, but also her unattainability:

Sic, patefacta egrediendi ianua, apparuit uirgo splendidissima tamquam aurum decocta, uelut a croceo cubili consurgens aurora, uti de thalamo procedens sponsa, quasi columba ad fenestram suam speculata.²³

Not yet chastened, the enraged Wilcoma subsequently rounds upon Mildreth, throws her to the ground so as to kick and batter her, and tears out her hair, locks which Mildreth then uses as a bookmark, as a tacit plea for help, in a psalter she has copied to send home to her mother. Goscelin refers to the hair as "like secondary relics, bodily relics, or the brands of martyrdom" [quasi reliquias, quasi pignora uel stigmata martyrii].²⁴ Eventually, Mildreth does escape, but not before her "persequutrix," Wilcoma, sends a small army after her as she sets sail for England, a final assault that is forestalled by a miraculous tide. Thus, not just one woman's fury, but whole troops of armed men are pitted against the virginity of a young girl. Once home, Mildreth takes the veil and becomes the abbess at Minster-in-Thanet, and the

remainder of the text focuses on her holy habits and death, to which we shall return later.

Of all the saints for whom Goscelin wrote full hagiographies, none was a true martyr. The exception is St Juthwara of Halstock, who was beheaded by her brother; Goscelin provided the briefest notice of her as an adjunct to the Life of a male saint, Wulfsgie, bishop of Sherborne, because her relics had been acquired by Sherborne.²⁵ One can see just from what we have looked at so far how much he would surely have relished tackling a true martyrdom and the extent to which that kind of sanctity was to the fore in his mind. The fact is that Mildreth, like many of the other women Goscelin wrote about, was a royal princess, entrusted doubtless for political reasons to a royally founded community, who died no martyr's death. Yet the emphasis (almost a third of the 10,000-word text) that Goscelin puts upon the virginity-under-threat motif which enables him to liken her to the martyrs means that it looms large in the reader's overall impression of Mildreth. Goscelin couples the motif with extensive use of the language of the Song of Songs, articulating Mildreth's status as bride of Christ. In this text, then, we find a mingling of genre – a *uita*, a biography, of a virgin non-martyr saint which deliberately appropriates some of the special aura of the martyr's *passio*, using what has been termed “hagiographic displacement.”²⁶

The displacement extends beyond the tale of Wilcoma's assault on Mildreth. Goscelin recounts an occasion later in Mildreth's life when again the Devil laid traps for her. Like God's own nightingale, he writes, Mildreth kept watch while the nuns slept. The Devil, in frustration, first sought to snuff out the candle by which she was reading, and then, when that failed (the candle was miraculously lit again), he decided to attack the saint during the few hours she did manage to sleep. This prompts Goscelin to recall that Datian, the persecutor of St Vincent of Saragossa, said, “If I cannot vanquish him while he lives, I shall smite him even in death,” and also that Agnes countered her assailants with the defiant statement, “I have the angel of the Lord as my body's protector.”²⁷ He thereby places Mildreth firmly in the company of the martyrs.

One turns from Goscelin's account of Mildreth with the strong suspicion that the hagiographer, or his immediate audience, those who had commissioned the text, regarded the virginity-under-threat motif as central, maybe even essential, to the woman's claim to sanctity; as if her virginal status had to be put to the test in order to be regarded as special. This leads us to ask whether Goscelin invented this aspect of the narrative, and, to go some way towards an answer, we need to

identify a source for the *Vita Mildrethe*. He certainly claimed to have a written source, observing in his preface, “We earnestly follow truth’s opinion, not from new witnesses, but from that Life and miracles of the saint written down in olden times or gleaned from old stories.”²⁸ David Rollason traced the various versions of what he called the Mildrith Legend, and although the earliest forms record that the saint received an education abroad before returning to be consecrated with seventy other virgins, Wilcoma and the virginity-under-threat motif occur in only one other reflex of the legend apart from Goscelin’s *uita*. This is an anonymous *passio* of the boy-martyrs Æthelred and Æthelberht, Mildreth’s uncles, who were murdered by their cousin Egbert, king of Kent.²⁹ The text is uniquely preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 285, a thirteenth-century manuscript possibly from Ramsey (which had acquired the boy-martyrs’ relics), and appears to cobble together different narratives, a royal genealogy, the *passio*, and an account of the translation of their relics. Just one feature of the text, a reference to Mildreth’s remains resting before the High Altar in St Augustine’s, Canterbury, has been taken as providing any useful dating criterion.³⁰ Mildreth was translated from Minster-in-Thamet to Canterbury by Ælfstan, abbot of St Augustine’s, in 1030.³¹ She was moved from before the main altar into a position by the wall of the north *porticus* by Abbot Wulfric (1047–59) as part of his re-ordering of the abbey church.³² David Rollason concluded from this that the portion of the narrative focusing on Mildreth must have originated at St Augustine’s some time between 1030 and 1060, but was redeployed at Ramsey at an unverifiable later date, to confect the composite *passio* as it stands in Bodley 285. The thirteenth-century date of that copy means that the relationship will perhaps never be established with certainty, but there is at least the possibility that an antecedent of the Bodley *passio* served as Goscelin’s source at St Augustine’s.³³

In this Bodley *passio* of Æthelberht and Æthelred, the tale of Mildreth at Chelles is told in just three paragraphs, but with all the essentials of the narrative: Abbess Wilcoma tried to persuade Mildreth to stay at Chelles for the rest of her life and promised her fabulous riches if she would consent to marry her young relative and, when faced with resistance, thrust the girl into a furnace, whence the saint re-emerged unharmed; then Wilcoma tore her hair out and Mildreth put it in the psalter to send home.³⁴ It has none of the rhetorical colour of Goscelin’s account, the abbess’s behaviour is not said to have been prompted by the Devil, and there is no explicit reference to this experience as a form of martyrdom; it is merely an allusion to the obvious parallel with the three boys in the Babylonian furnace. If it is safe to postulate that this Bodley *passio* could reflect the content of

Goscelin's source, then he does not appear to have invented the story of Mildreth's persecution. He merely stoked the heat, as it were: from a handful of paragraphs in the earlier version to several pages of vivid narrative.³⁵ Goscelin was the master of rhetorical amplification upon exiguous raw materials. Is that all he was seeking to do in this case, to generate verbiage? Or is the quasi-martyrdom scene an emphatic dwelling on a particular point? When closely compared with the Bodley narrative, Goscelin's amplifications can be seen to heighten the emotional impact of the story, with the unmistakable aim of provoking an empathetic response on the part of his audience.

The *Vita Mildrethe* was probably one of Goscelin's last pen-portraits of a female saint. It is illuminating to compare that account with what may have been his first attempt at hagiography, namely, the *Vita* of Amelberga of Munsterbilzen which I have elsewhere argued that he wrote in the 1050s as a very young man before he left his native Flanders for England.³⁶ Like several other *Lives* possibly by Goscelin, this attribution cannot be established beyond doubt: Jean Bolland himself was convinced, even though the scholar who prepared the edition for *Acta Sanctorum*, Pierre du Sollier, was more hesitant.³⁷ The case seems to me to be reasonably strong, though the most recent extensive work on Goscelin, Stephanie Hollis's *Wilton Women*, describes his Life of Edith, written in about 1080, as one of the first works that he completed.³⁸

Amelberga's relics came into the possession of St Peter's, Ghent, in 864.³⁹ Two post-translation accounts of her survive: a short homily by Radbod, bishop of Utrecht (899–917), and later a rather longer *uita*, written by a novice oarsman on hagiography's vast ocean.⁴⁰ The *uita* is broadly based on Radbod's earlier narrative, pumping up just over 1,000 words to some 10,000 (remarkably similar in dimension to the *Vita Mildrethe*) through rhetorical elaboration and imaginative recasting. Radbod stated that Amelberga had been pursued by a king, whom he called "Karolus," and he very briefly related that the suitor followed her even into church; when she spurned him in favour of the True Bridegroom, he angrily grabbed her arm to drag her away, thereby breaking her shoulder, which Christ then healed. Much to the obvious irritation of the Bollandist editor du Sollier, Goscelin, if he can be accepted as the young hagiographer, converted this into an extraordinarily romantic, but very tall, tale. Perhaps worst of all, he muddled his Karoli, and by a chronological impossibility had Charlemagne as Amelberga's troublesome stalker; du Sollier suggested that it should have been Charles Martel. Goscelin milked the story for all it was worth, using the careful placing of detail to heighten the emotion of each scene: the first meeting, the suitor's fantasies, and the

initial proposal. Amelberga is among the nuns building a wall with her own hands when Karolus first sees her and, smitten immediately, his inner thought is “Ecce Karole, quae complacuit animae tuae” [See Karolus, she is the one your soul desires], and he can hardly bear to see rough stones and planks in her soft little hands. So he approaches her:

Deinde vero, inter oscula et amplexus, desiderium animi sui iuuenilis, aperuit, atque ut sponsa sua nominari, ac matrimonio sibi copulari debeat, in omni prece descendit. Quam neque blanditiis illectam, vel terroribus concussam flectere ualuit, quatenus suo amori communicaret, quia fundata supra murum fidei, ut turris inexpugnabilis mansit. Virgo autem Domini, erectis in celum luminibus, in silentio labiorum implorat suffragia angelorum, invitat presentiam Apostolorum, ipsisque mediantibus, hanc Deo gratam immurmurat orationis hostiam: Jesu benigne ... respice ancille tue contritionem. Tibi, sponso immortalis uirginalia pudicitie mee deuoui, et fidei arrham huc usque reseruauit. Auctor castitatis, conserua tibi dicatum florem mee uirginitatis. Descende, Domine, ad precem meam, atque huius tyranni compesce furem, nequando corporis mei commercium suae libidini contingat fieri ludibrium.⁴¹

Radbod simply stated that Karolus wooed her; Goscelin amplified this statement with an account of how his father, Pippin, first spies her out as a suitable match, but piously accepts her protestations; yet his son goes after her regardless. Worthy of note in this passage is Amelberga’s reference to Karolus as “this tyrant” in her prayer, immediately assuming the discourse of martyrdom, even though the young man has done nothing wrong, and is subsequently characterized as a “iuuenis praestantissimus” and “magnanimus.”⁴² An answer to her prayer comes in the form of a bear, which he rushes off to hunt down, thereby earning the title “Karolus Magnus.” When he returns from this adventure, she has shut herself in the church and put a reliquary on her head:

Illa humi anhelabat et sic auctorem suae integritatis compellebat: Domine Rex angelorum et susceptor peccatorum, annue pro honore tui nominis, ne in me prevaleat imperium terrene tyrannidis. Dulcedo anime mee, non transeant in me carnalis copule uenenae. Gloria mea, non sic confundar famula tua, ut denuder castitatis stola. Te sponsum elegi, pulcritudinem tuam concupiui ... Tuis ut complaceam in nuptiis, pudicitie annulis, et aureae uirginitatis monilibus ne spolier, deposco. Respice, piissime, de celis, et salua me ex ore leonis.⁴³

The prayers she pours out to her heavenly Bridegroom, both at this point and earlier in the narrative, contain reminiscences of the prayer of Agnes in the most widely circulated form of her *passio*.⁴⁴ The suitor

is determined to smash down the doors and drag her out and can be dissuaded only when Landrada, the abbess of Munsterbilzen, promises to try to bring Amelberga round to his point of view. Goscelin later observes that this assault, and the worse harassment that follows, are part of God's plan to mix martyrdom into the cocktail of her sanctity: "Interea Dominus Jesus rite memor care sue, pie disposuit adhuc eam pro priuilegio uirginalis glorie, altius mirificare, et sui nominis sponsam, sub ala protectionis sue fouere. Et quia consilio Altissimi, ut uirginei pudoris gloria coronaretur palma martyrii, insigne passionis trophæum taliter precurrit procella persecutionis."⁴⁵

By contrast with what we have observed in the Mildreth "persecution" narrative, Goscelin leaves the potential perversion of Landrada's role unrealized. Although we learn that she promises to "reconcile the virgin's mind to his lust, and to become the very handmaid in his bridal bed-chamber" [se Virginis animum suæ cupidini reconciliari, ipsamque assistricem sui thalami futuram fore], there is never a chance for her to put such a scheme into action, because Amelberga runs away from Munsterbilzen at this point in the narrative.⁴⁶ That is to say, there is a sense in which Landrada is an undeveloped prototype of the intemperate Wilcoma, but perhaps partly because Landrada herself was venerated as a saint, the idea could not suitably be pushed any further on this occasion. Perverse treachery does, however, come in the person of Amelberga's guardian, Hunrod, to whom the hagiographer attributes a plan to hand the girl over to her suitor; as he puts it, "a blood relative, who could also have helped her greatly, betrayed and persecuted her."⁴⁷ As in the Mildreth narrative, there may here be a subtext commenting upon the apparent powerlessness of the individual in the face of treacherous and corrupt figures of authority in whom the victim is nevertheless obliged to trust. As a monk of Saint-Bertin (if that is what he was at the time he was commissioned to write a Life of Amelberga), Goscelin would have found himself under obedience to Abbot Bovo (1042–65), who emerges from his own writings as self-serving and ambitious and is depicted by another former Saint-Bertin monk, Folcard, as a scathing critic of his young protégées.⁴⁸

Goscelin prolongs the marriage-quest far beyond what Radbod's account conveyed. Amelberga flees Munsterbilzen and has various adventures, and her suitor is, for the time being, detained by wars, but on hearing that Amelberga plans to go abroad, his love re-ignites and he hunts her down. At news of his imminent arrival she runs into church. Here again Goscelin emphasizes the martyrial quality of her experience – this scene ushers in the climactic physical attack – enabling her to claim both lily and rose:

Completaque oratione, arrepto ferro sisinnos capitis sui totondit, atque sacro uelamine adoperuit; non degenerem ab inclytis Christi tironibus, dico martyribus, gerens animum, qui ferro et igne per Decios triumpharunt et Neronem. Preclarum facti genus! ... Videns interim Rex, non aspirare secunda uotis suis, et detecta secreta consilii sui, eo quod Virginem Dei, quam silentio domi offendere parabat, ad ecclesiam confugisse didicerat, usus est audacia pro sapientia. Denique, quod non licebat, post eam impudentius ecclesiam irrupit ... Vnde sublatus in ira, magnificentiam regie pietatis polluit crudelitate seuissime tyrannidis. Itaque totis uiribus humerum contorquens, fracto uirginalis humeri osse, uere Dei sponsam agnouit, Christique Martyrem perfecit. Verumtamen non prius de loco, quo incubuit Virgo Domini surrexit, donec care sue flenti et oranti apparuit Dominus Jesus, et electam sibi integerrime restituit sanitati. Sic denique beatissima Virgo, angelici uodis emula, ex seminibus castitatis preclarum uindemiauit fructum passionis; uere, inquam, ter et amplius beata, cui Dominus, ut duplicis brauii coronam prestaret, candide eam induit uirginitatis lilio, cum rubra martyrii palma.⁴⁹

In contrast to the *Vita Mildrethe*, Goscelin avoids linking the demented tyrant's assault upon Christ's bride directly with the Devil, although that is the natural gloss upon this oppositional relationship, stated explicitly at an earlier stage in the narrative: "See, for Your sake [Christ], how many snares are laid for Your virgin, whom even the demons themselves and their satellites attack on every side so as to snatch her from You."⁵⁰ The idea is also given voice earlier in the text: Goscelin anticipates Amelberga's quasi-martyrdom early in his narrative, with a story not present in Radbod's account. As a girl, she builds herself a little oratory in her parents' garden, and the Devil, dismayed at such piety, prompts a boy to steal from Amelberga, but in the very act the boy is divinely punished by paralysis and then restored by the saint's prayers. Bishop Willibrord, who happens to be passing, hears the tale and exclaims over this small persecution and the ensuing miracle:

Nos qui portauimus pondus diei et aestus, nil tale adhuc consecuti sumus, et tibi, beatissima Virgo, ad sublimandum uirginalis gloriae fastigium diuina pietas sic contulit gratiam sanctitatis: uirginitate, qua immortalis sponsi thalamum ascendere meruisti, laudem et gloriam in aeternis seculis peperisti. Hostis antiquus per puerum, amicum sibi mancipium, te illudere gestiebat, sed fractis uiribus defecit, unde et Christus sponsus honorem tibi praestitit et splendorem. Floreas igitur cum Tecla, ualeas cum Agnete, et cum Maria optima sit pars tua.⁵¹

Significantly, Goscelin has Willibrord link the martyrs Thecla and Agnes with a third name, Mary, the sister of Martha, alluding to that

significant moment in Luke's Gospel (10:42). Thus, he deftly mingles martyrdom with another role model, that of the solitary contemplative, for whom Mary and her "best part" had become emblematic within western monasticism, under the influence, at least to begin with, of the writings of John Cassian.⁵² The devil launches a subsequent assault on Amelberga while she flees through the countryside, sending demons in the shapes of roaring lions, growling bears and leopards, and howling wolves and hissing serpents, whose significance will be examined shortly.

As is true in the *uita* of Mildreth, the virginity-under-threat motif dominates the text, in this case to such an extent that it is hard to recall what else might have been notable about Amelberga; certainly, after the final crisis, the narrative speeds swiftly to her death. Like Mildreth's, the impression is that Amelberga's virtue's protection defines her sanctity. Here, though, Goscelin certainly did not invent this notion; he only expanded enthusiastically. His source, Radbod, concludes his homily by proclaiming Amelberga's right to share in the joy of the martyrs through her constancy.⁵³

Perhaps the best-known example of Goscelin's handling of the theme of virginity-under-threat comes in his *uita* of Wulfhild, written for Barking (Essex) in about 1086.⁵⁴ This text recounted events played out just over a century before, so Wulfhild was a less distant figure than Amelberga and Mildreth. The central part of the *uita* is the tale of King Edgar's amorous pursuit of Wulfhild, which has features in common with the narratives we have already examined. Edgar is aided by Wulfhild's aunt, Wenflæd, who fancied the idea of a royal relative, and thus, as Goscelin puts it, sought to "irretire" [ensnare] her niece by feigning illness to get her to come visiting. Wulfhild walks straight into the trap:

Ecce omnia tendicula, ecce reciacula quibus auicula Christi tota uidebatur intercepta, ecce rex Eadgarus sedens ad conuiuia assidente ipsa Vuenfleda non languida sed regalibus epulis iocunda. Iesu potentissime, quid tunc faceret ad te flagrans anima? Quanto laetius tunc uidisset bestias Teclae, tortores Agathae, ignes Luciae! Sed quomodo appareret tua uera uera dilectione sponsa nisi hec probarent temptamenta?⁵⁵

Poor Wulfhild attempts to escape by retiring for a rest, but bodyguards are sent to accompany her, and so as a last resort she goes to the privy, flees the premises through the sewer, and makes her way back to Wilton the next morning. Edgar goes after her there, but she refuses to come near, and Goscelin introduces the parallel with Lucy, as he was later to do when writing of Mildreth:

Vtque quondam furens Pascasius omnibus uiribus hominum boum et cordarum immobilem fidei columnam Luciam ad lupanar trahere contendebat, ita rex omnibus nexibus legationum donationum adulationum allicere sibi Vulfildam sanctam temtabat. Sed sicut beata Lucia immoto corpore pro uasta rupe restitit, ita hec uirgo animo in Christo fundata incaptabilis perdurauit.⁵⁶

Wulfhild flees into church and clutches a reliquary, but not before Edgar has made a grab for her and ripped off her sleeve, which brings him to his senses. The details of the scene are strongly reminiscent of the pursuit of Amelberga, even though the moment of physical assault is toned down, or at any rate made into the symbolic rending of the virgin's garment. Again, although the tyrant/martyr opposition is once more played out here, as it is in the shaping of Amelberga's trials, Goscelin carefully avoids overstating the demonic element in Edgar's actions: Wulfhild fears the Devil in his actions, but the king, "like faithful David," came to his senses.⁵⁷ In fact, the aunt, Wenflæd, comes off worse, described as "knowing in the way to deceive."⁵⁸ Overall, the *Vita Wulfhilde* is told more tersely than the other two texts we have so far considered, perhaps partly because of the constraints of composing a text intended to form part of a full dossier for Barking. As for Goscelin's source here, it has been assumed that his account of Edgar's wooing was a true story. So, for example, Barbara Yorke, investigating nunneries in Anglo-Saxon England, observes that "the 'nun resisting marriage' convention may have influenced the telling of Wulfhild's tale to a certain extent, but the account has a number of unusual circumstantial details that give it credibility. Although Goscelin skilfully embellished his sources, he did need something to embellish ... one can imagine that this was a tale Wulfhild recounted many times."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Wulfhild's Lucy-like sufferings do seem to lie at the heart of her claim to sanctity. Again, too, we may observe the theme of betrayal by a trusted but self-serving elder (in this case Wenflæd).

Prompted particularly by this last example, Stephanie Hollis, in her ground-breaking study of the status of Anglo-Saxon women, suggested that Goscelin knew only one way to write about women, that he sought, or was asked, to "mould them closer to the Roman virgin martyrs," particularly where information was lacking.⁶⁰ The *Vita Amelberge* certainly reads as the product of a mind deeply imbued with the stories from the early persecuted Church. Elisabeth Van Houts, writing of Goscelin's apparent sympathy with women and thinking in particular of Amelberga, has observed "We may wonder what such literature did to the young monk's psyche."⁶¹ Yet it is fair to say that Goscelin did not force every woman he wrote about into his fantasy

seduction scene. Some simply could not be made to conform because they were married women who had borne children (notably the Ely ladies, Seaxburh and Eormenhild), and for them different narrative strategies were required.⁶² In other cases he had quite a detailed source which was and is well known: two other *Lives* he wrote for Barking alongside that of Wulfhild draw on narratives in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, which did not tempt Goscelin into using the virginity-under-threat motif in either case, even though both Æthelburh and Hildelith were virginal abbesses.⁶³

More directly comparable to Mildreth, though, is Wærburh, a saint whose Life Goscelin composed for Ely, and another for whom there is a surviving text which may incorporate material he composed for the same house, namely, Wihtburh. Both were virginal but also, like Mildreth, figures distant in time.⁶⁴ Wærburh is linked to Ely through being the granddaughter of Æthelthryth's sister, Seaxburh, and Goscelin's text looks like a companion piece to the *Lives* of her mother and grandmother, Eormenhild and Seaxburh, both abbesses of Ely. If a pre-existing narrative of Wærburh's life served as Goscelin's source, it has left no trace. As for Wihtburh, her relics were stolen by the abbot of Ely from her resting-place in East Dereham in Norfolk in the tenth century, and it was necessary for Ely to create a legendary connection to the saint by making her another of Æthelthryth's sisters. Chronological dislocations within the hagiography suggest the tenuous nature of the claim.⁶⁵ Again, no early account of the saint has survived. For both women, then, one might suppose that Goscelin had ample scope to give his vivid imagination full rein. In the *Vita Werburge* the motif of unwanted marriage is dispensed with in a single peremptory sentence: "for love of perpetual virginity she flew to the bridegroom of eternal integrity, and with angelic modesty she repelled royal suitors and lovers, or rather Christ, dwelling with his chosen one, snatched her away from those who desired her."⁶⁶ The narrative potential in the topos remains unrealized. In the case of the *Vita Wihtburge*, it is again only a vestigial narrative element – the vocabulary presses all the right buttons, including bridal imagery drawn from the Song of Songs; reference to suitors, bribes, blandishments, and threats; and an allusion to the *passio* of Agnes, but all in short space.⁶⁷ Neither of these texts conveys any real sense of crisis over the preservation of the saint's virginity, and the details are not dwelt upon; it is part of the saintly repertoire, a trope that seems necessary, but it is not made to dominate.

A few years ago, in an unpublished paper, I sought to make a case for Goscelin's authorship of the still unprinted *uita* of Mildburh, sister to the Mildreth with whom we began and founding abbess of Much Wenlock abbey.⁶⁸ There the virginity-under-threat motif appears, but in

a way that again smacks of putting the saint through her paces; that is, it is included as a brief story with no lead-in, no consequences, and no emphasis on the event as a species of martyrdom. Mildburh is pounced upon by an unnamed king's son, flees him as a dove flees a hawk, and a sudden spate in the local river cuts off the pursuit. The "appetitor sacrilegus insecutor nequissimus" [sacrilegious suitor, most wicked pursuer] makes this one cameo appearance and is gone. His cardboard-cut-out quality is reminiscent of Mildreth's suitor. Goscelin states that Mildburh longed for the wings of a dove so as remain a solitary:

Fuga statim preparatur, urgetur, acceleratur. Virgo quidem sicut periculum amplius timuit, sic periculi fugam otius preripuit, tam precauens niuei pudoris maculam, quam perhorrens thori maritalis copulam. Fugit ergo uirum, ut columba nisum, columbe sibi pennas dauitico desiderio desiderans, quibus ipsa uolet ut requiescat, sic elonget ut solitaria maneat. Solitaria nulli uiro cognita, solitaria Deo soli dedita.⁶⁹

The repeated use of the word *solitaria* suggests that a model other than that of the female martyr was pushing to the fore here, namely, that of the contemplative hermit, for whom the dove was a favoured image for Goscelin.⁷⁰ Moreover, it is striking that the hagiographer placed this episode immediately after a lengthy passage which makes extensive use of bridal imagery and moves from Mildburh's "theoria" [contemplation of God], through her likeness to Mary in choosing the contemplative way rather than Martha's active way, to a meditation on wisdom, the pursuit of which distinguishes Mildburh from the foolish virgins unable to enter the Lamb's marriage feast.

In quantum autem theorie culmen ipsa dehinc erigeretur, et quanta per theoriam ueri Salomonis sapientia frueretur utile ducimus uobis effari propter utilitatem imitandi. Vos uero delectet prebere auditum, qui et theoriam et sapientiam desideratis habere. Efficitur ergo celesti theoria Domini familiaris altera Maria uirgo Milburga abstinens cum ipsa turbate sororis officio, condelectata beate quietis et contemplacionis ocio, Domini electa electrix optime partis que non auferetur eligenti nec minuitur fruenti. O tam eligenda porcio, quam iocunda eius fruicio ... Ne igitur misericordiam a Domino non mereretur et cum uirginibus fatuis repulsas a celestibus nupciis pateretur, prout iam dixi, docta uirgo Milburga sapientiam amauit, et exquisiuit a iuuentute sua. Non huius mundi sapientiam sed que docet eius abstinenciam.⁷¹

Taken in this context, Goscelin's deployment of the virginity-under-threat motif becomes just one element in the filling-out of Mildburh's saintly qualifications, but one to which rather less space is accorded than to the spiritual and meditative aspects of her God-ward ascent.

Actual flight from the world as embodied by a lustful suitor lends vivid physicality to the saint's *anachoresis*, but is not treated as necessarily her primary or defining claim to sanctity. Later in the text, Goscelin describes Mildburh's affective prayer with the psalmist, a spiritual exercise which seems not only more compellingly real evidence of a holy life than fleeing a suitor across a river in spate, but also a more attainable model for whatever audience the hagiographer had in mind:

Deo itaque deuotissima sacre uirginis anima psalmiste sensus et affectus in se trahebat, tractos in se suos proprios efficiebat. Vnde cum ipso laborabat gemitu continuo, preuidens furorem uenturi iudicis, sese configebat timore diuino, timens et sibi precauens a tremendis eius iudiciis. Vnde cum psalmiste anima nolebat uirginis anima consolari, dum ipsa manens in corpore mortis habebat a Domino peregrinari. Sic cum ipso uescebatur pane doloris, dum ei differebatur fruicio diuine uisionis. Cum ipso quoque uulnerata spiculis superni amoris rigabatur cotidie lacrimis intime conpunctionis, siciens ad Deum fontem uiuum ut ceruus ad fontes aquarum.⁷²

The virginity-under-pursuit motif lies dormant in Goscelin's longest and most elaborate *uita*, that of Edith of Wilton, now accessible in the translation by Michael Wright and Kathleen Loncar.⁷³ Bernhard Pabst, in his two-volume epic study of prosimetrum, describes that *uita* as one of the finest specimens of prosimetric composition to survive from the Middle Ages, a veritable high point.⁷⁴ There are other ways in which it is remarkable, as Stephanie Hollis has shown, and the features which she highlights overlap with what is observable in the *Vita Milburge*. Hollis writes that the Edith Life is "striking in its anticipation of the bridal mysticism associated with twelfth-century Cistercian writing, which gave new prominence to the exegetical interpretation of the Song of Songs as an expression of the relationship between God and the individual soul."⁷⁵ Nowhere in that text, though, is Edith's virginity on trial: Hollis posits it as a move away from the heroism of a battle with dark forces, towards the passionate quest for union with the Bridegroom.⁷⁶ She is clearly right in this, but elsewhere in the same essay she states that Goscelin makes little use of nuptial imagery outside his Legend of Edith, other than in the Life of Mildreth with which this discussion began.⁷⁷ There I must part company with her, since it seems to me that the language of the Song of Songs wafts throughout Goscelin's hagiography, often with the deftest of throw-away allusions, even when he writes about male saints.⁷⁸ I also believe that the journey from heroic martyr-struggle towards solitary contemplation of the Bridegroom, with its breathless expectancy, can be traced in almost all of his depictions of female saints.

We can see the extent to which the contemplative was as powerful a model for Goscelin as that of the early martyrs, by picking up some of the threads I have left hanging in this chapter. Goscelin describes the way in which Edith kept a menagerie at Wilton (as much as anything a sign of the privileged life she led there), noting that, when she went among the animals, she did so in the manner of a desert hermit:

Tales nimirum hospites, si quando uacabat, mente uisebat anachoritica, ut Antonianae et Macharianae solitudinis amica, et partis Mariae emula. Fugit beata seculares tumultus, tutiusque uersatur cum beluis quam cum hominibus. Hoc docuit ipse Christus quadragesimam suam cum bestiis exsecutus. Solitudo foetus Israeli, solitariis suis inuenitur solitarius.⁷⁹

We have already had cause to note a reference to Mary's choice as distinct from that of Martha, in the *Vita Milburge*. Goscelin used that biblical tag in the same way in his longer *Life of St Augustine (BHL 777)*, to express the saint's yearnings to withdraw from the world:

Ipse uero theoricus contemplator, ut mundi opprimentis perfuga, ut passer solitarius in tecto, gaudebat nimium, ruptis rerum retinaculis, pennis aeterni amoris ad Dominum euolare, in optima parte Mariae requiescere, soli Deo uacare, reuelata facie gloriae Domini assistere, eiusque perpetua pasci dulcedine.⁸⁰

The theme also appeared in a passage from the *Vita Amelberge* (c. 4) already quoted above (p. 289): "May you then flourish with Thecla, prevail with Agnes, and with Mary may yours be the best part." Here, what Goscelin surely intended by placing Mary's name alongside those of Thecla and Agnes, was to suggest that the contemplative afforded as strong a strand in the make-up of Amelberga's sanctity as persecuted virginity. Strikingly, when demons assault Amelberga in her desert, they take on a variety of noisy animal forms, a narrative element clearly indebted to a famous scene in Evagrius's Latin translation of Athanasius's *Life of Antony the Hermit*, in which exactly the same thing happens while Antony is in his desert.⁸¹

It is, of course, well known that from the start the confessor-saints, and those who wrote about them, strained after the same sacrifice that the martyrs made, through mortification. As an outer manifestation of inner wrestling, the Devil and his satellites are generally portrayed as the agency which strains these saints' resolve to the breaking point. Such battles are presented vividly in the text which is the fount of the confessor tradition, the *Life of Antony*, just mentioned. Athanasius showed Antony suffering actual bodily harm from demonic attacks, but he also made demons a prominent theme in the hermit's address to his followers (in cc. 15–16). The Antonine model of sacred biography,

coupled with the Martinian version established by Sulpicius Severus, set the pattern for male hagiography and offered later authors a clear path to follow. It is not immediately obvious that a comparably distinct framework was available for those writing about female saints; as already noted, the early female martyrs are an obvious if narrowly applicable model. One might posit another, namely, Venantius Fortunatus's portrait of Queen Radegund with her gory excesses of bodily mortification, an extreme example of self-inflicted quasi-martyrdom, asceticism that goes beyond the bloodless.⁸² Although there were aspects of *that* model which may have been useful to Goscelin when he needed to write about a married female saint who was also a queen, namely, Seaxburh of Ely, Fortunatus's emphasis on self-mutilation did not have wide appeal as a model.⁸³ To revert to the text with which we began, by emphasizing the Devil's agency in Mildreth's persecution, Goscelin implicitly suggests that *her* battles are of the same stamp as Antony's, that the desert fathers can be a model for women too.⁸⁴ Indeed, Goscelin placed intertextual clues which, for a well-trained monastic audience, would have underlined this point. Describing Mildreth's early training at Chelles, he notes that she studied to emulate the virtues of others, taking on "this one's humility, that one's patience, another's abstinence, another's watchfulness, and the love, kindness, gentleness, and modesty of some others."⁸⁵ These words echo strikingly those of Athanasius/Evagrius, who observed that Antony, when first preparing himself for a hermit's life, took on "this man's continence, the good cheer of that, the mildness of this one, that one's watchfulness, another's diligence in reading; he admired this one in his fast, that one taking his rest on the hard ground; praised the patience of one, and the gentleness of the next."⁸⁶ Moreover, the very next point that the *Vita Antonii* moves on to make is that the enemy of the Christian, the Devil, finding such virtues insufferable in a young man, looked for ways to attack him.

In other words, it is indeed the case that his reading of the passions of the martyrs made a deep impression on Goscelin, but he was conscious too of the solitary contemplative tradition and perhaps experimented with different ways of fusing these two strands in his hagiography. Hollis presents him as ahead of his time in his spiritual orientation, and one suspects that there is mileage to be made with some further exploration of the forces that shaped Goscelin's spirituality: where his ideas came from and the extent to which his contemporaries and countrymen, such as Folcard of Saint-Bertin and Drogo of Saint-Winnocksbergen, were in the same place in their understanding of sanctity and eremitism.⁸⁷ In a recent essay on the Flemish hagiographers active in England, Elisabeth Van Houts has also

noted the apparent empathy displayed by those authors for the women who were their patrons and the subjects of their works.⁸⁸ She suggests that this empathy injected a new emotional depth into the way they wrote about women, the vulnerability of their own exiled status allowing them to identify with those destined to be commodities or victims of the decisions and desires of those more powerful than themselves. It is certainly hard to read Goscelin's many female hagiographies without wondering how he viewed women, belonging as he did to an age often presented as prevailingly misogynistic. Frank Barlow was moved to observe of him, "He liked women," and he "never said unpleasant things about their sex."⁸⁹ Of course, overtly expressed sexism is one thing, a genuinely held sense of women's value, abilities, and equality with men quite another. What, for example, should we make of the defence of the validity of women's testimony which Goscelin offers in the preface to his *Life of Wulfhild*? He remarks, "Mary, the first angel-like bringer of the news of Lord's resurrection, and the host of holy prophetesses show that we ought not to reject trustworthy testimony of this kind [scil. female]."⁹⁰

With the preservation of Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius* or *Book of Comforting*, we are privileged to have some insight into the hagiographer's view of his own relationship with Eve, a young woman who seems to have left a deep impression upon his heart, to whom the work is addressed. Rebecca Hayward has written compellingly about the tension between what she calls the "ennobling love" of spiritual friendship which Goscelin expresses for Eve in her distant anchorage and a more earth-bound desire that aches for physical proximity.⁹¹ His feelings for Eve in the *Liber confortatorius* seem susceptible to a variety of interpretations: admiration for the strength of character which means she is in port while he is still all at sea, yearning for a better half, "my soul," or sentimentalized fantasizing about an imagined (perhaps also one-sided) intimacy with a desirable young woman whose marriage to God moved him to tears?⁹² After all, Goscelin's strong wish to be close to Eve and her unannounced flight to Angers during his absence from Wilton distantly mirror the drama of hounding suitor and fleeing virgin which we have been examining in his own hagiographies. The precise nature of his relationship with this particular young woman will forever remain out of our reach, and perhaps, in fact, "out of reach" was the key phrase for him too, so that the desirable but unattainable otherness of woman – the radiant dove glimpsed at the window of her dovecote – informed Goscelin's narratives.

In thinking about the authorial intention behind – and indeed audience perspective on – scenes in which young women are presented

as fending off the attentions of men, the word *rape* is never far away. Kathryn Gravdal's study of medieval French hagiography as semi-pornography, *Ravishing Maidens*, encourages the reader to go as far as describing the virginity motif that way.⁹³ Might one seek to argue that Goscelin's apparent fixation with "moulding" his women to the martyr model, as Hollis puts it, lends itself to speculation about a voyeuristic tendency, focused on the passively suffering female body as an object to be violated in the imagination? In truth, it is inaccurate to speak of rape in any of the cases discussed here; we can talk only of would-be rape, though in the world of love-fantasy there is no denying what Brigitte Cazelles once described as "the superior pleasure of erotic deferral."⁹⁴ Attempting to look into the hagiographer's mind inevitably leads us to project his impulses outwards onto his intended readership. I have already touched on the potential that David Townsend has pinpointed for a sophisticated layering of audience in the case of the *Life of Mildreth*. There is no doubt that Goscelin was writing that text for the monks at St Augustine's – in his preface he warns off outsiders: "Goodbye to those who despise these matters as not pertaining to them. They are meant for those of you, her servants, who love the mistress given by God."⁹⁵ What then did he wish to achieve for that audience, or prove to them, or teach them? Is there warrant for thinking of such a text as the private safe space in which to indulge fantasies and then shut them off again, no harm done? It would be a less conventional aspect of hagiography's purpose, but need not be that deliberate a gesture.⁹⁶ Moreover, it makes little difference whether the audience comprises the monks at St Augustine's imagining what happened to the young Mildreth or the nuns of Barking savouring Goscelin's bodice-ripper of a *Life of Wulfhild*: women's fantasies can be every bit as violent as men's.⁹⁷ A further idea to consider is that Goscelin's depiction of Mildreth's steadfast striving colludes with the notion that such naturally carnal beings as she are best kept safely locked away, enclosed and stripped of power.

Whatever conclusion we reach, though, it is important to maintain perspective: unlike the martyr narratives discussed by Trilling elsewhere in this volume, Goscelin's texts nowhere show us stripped and bloodied female flesh, pierced by swords and laid on the rack. The most aggressive gesture he ever depicts on the part of a man is the grabbing of a woman's arm – in the case of Amelberga with the agonizing if short-lived consequence of a broken shoulder, for Wulfhild only a torn sleeve – each time revealing the impotence of the aggressor to lay hold upon what he desires so fervently and inappropriately. In other narratives, such as the *Life of Mildreth*, a distance is maintained between female and male, and in that particular case the torments

inflicted on the saint by her female assailant hardly serve to pollute, let alone titillate: somehow Mildreth remains remote from and untouched by Wilcoma's raving and battering. In any case, I am wary of subscribing wholeheartedly to an interpretation of Goscelin's texts which uniformly regards male readers as brutish and female readers as sexually frustrated. His marked emphasis upon the detachment from the world and the flesh which is the contemplative eremitic ideal suggests another reading of the virginity-pursued scene, as an encouragement to his readers and listeners to fight off the hounding of temptation or the oppression of those to whom one is obliged to owe trustful obedience, by showing that it is not a lonely journey for those who put their trust in the shadow of the Lord's wings, and that the reward for steadfastness is immortality.

What is more, if we are looking in Goscelin's writings for that which has the warmth of a love-fantasy, it may well be less the imagining of violence and violation and more an understated, slow-burning tenderness and compassionate intimacy that strikes. There is something of this in the radiant beauty of Mildreth singing in her furnace-boudoir. But consider also the following, a scene towards the end of the *Vita Mildrethe*, when the saint is overwhelmed with longing to die:

Venit enim subito Deus dilectionis, dulcis et suavis Dominus spiritus Domini Jesu et, ut flumen pacis et torrens inundans et fluminis impetus letificans ciuitatem suam, fonte caritatis sue repleuit et inebriauit eam, quamque misericordia eius preuenerat ut fleret, subsecuta est ut amplius ad ipsum fleret. Cui uelut in Jordane lacrimarum baptizate apparuit, ipse spiritus Domini in specie columbe, super niuem candide, super solem splendide, seditque familiarissime in eius capitis uertice. Sedit in arce sua ales mitissima et ipsa potestas altissima. Virgo gemebat et columba columbam suam permulcebat. Ipsa ore placido pacem ferebat, alis blandifluis per timpora uirginea applaudebat, faciem et ceruicem gratissimis pennis reuerberabat, totum caput amicabilem astringebat. Loquebatur intus ad cor Jerusalem dulcesque susurros et intima uerba eius pectori inserebat, foris quoque piis nutibus quasi sermonibus dicebat: "Amica, quid ploras? Quem queris? Mecum uenit tibi, et tecum est quem diligit anima tua. Ego sum amor dilecti tui... iungeris ipsi, me mediatore ... Surge, prospera, amica mea."⁹⁸

For some readers this is perhaps rather mawkish – the caresses and nods of the dove, its gentle cooing – not far from the saccharine anthropomorphism of the world of Walt Disney. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon a saint in the form of a dove is a biblically inspired trope of hagiography, yet the touch of tenderness – the caresses and the whispering of "intimate words" – in this replaying of the motif is unusual in its emotional warmth if we can put aside an instinctive

modern distaste. One might also compare the story which Goscelin includes in the *Vita Milburge* in which the saint is startled awake by a sunbeam, so that her veil tumbles off only to be caught by the sun's ray, "like a trusty groomsman" [tanquam fidelis paranimphus]. He imagines the sun very tenderly addressing the saint:

Domina mi, lucis filia, ueri solis sponsa clarissima, non tibi succenseas,
nec ullatenus doleas, quod sic insolenter excitaris, icta radio mei iubaris.
Redi ad te et aduerte superne uisitationis indicium, quod tibi clarescit in
me per angelicum obsequium.⁹⁹

These expressions of tenderness by the celestial Bridegroom towards his chosen one are animated and suffused by the tenderness of the hagiographer towards his subject in her unattainable beauty and divine love-longing. It is as if to observe Mildreth, Mildburh, or Edith in the mind's eye is to relive again the moment when Eve stepped forward (and thus forever out of reach) at her consecration:

Vbi uero ... ad dominicas nuptias trepida et penultima accessisti ... ille humilis habitus, ille tremebundus accessus, ille suffusus uultus, tanquam ab igneo throno Dei sedentis super cherubim ... altius uiscera me percussere ... Tactus sum rore celesti et feruore irriguo fleui.¹⁰⁰

There is no escaping the fact that male hagiographers traditionally problematized the gender of female saints; as Howard Bloch put it, they are simultaneously both Brides of Christ and the Devil's gateway in their sexuality.¹⁰¹ Moreover, an emphasis on women as solitary contemplatives is of a piece with the mentality that sought to silence them and put them out of sight by strict enclosure. Nevertheless, I do wonder whether in Goscelin's work there is also room for a celebration of the feminine. It may well be that he knew only one way to write about women saints – as female martyrs – and he did so in very telling fashion, sweeping his audience along on waves of emotion, playing upon a shared sense of vulnerability in the face of the world and its desires and the ever-present danger of betrayal by powers both secular and ecclesiastical. Yet at the same time we can perhaps see Goscelin at the end of his career looking to move female sanctity towards something more spiritually profitable and accessible, which puts holiness beyond the world's touch. Increasingly, his women were not wholly passive victims, but rather strove by prayer, meditation, and rivers of penitential tears – actively contemplative, as it were – towards the much-desired union with the Bridegroom, exemplars of tenacious virginity but also models of steadfast God-ward focus. In a striking half-reversal of roles, Mildreth, the same woman to whom Goscelin gave the

words “Torture me, rend me, burn me, kill me!” is shown at the end of her life, in the vigorous passion of her longing for union with Christ in death, bellowing out the psalmist’s reproach, “How long, O Lord, wilt thou forget me, unto the end?”¹⁰² In a starkly terse statement, Goscelin observes, “*Amicum inquietabat, celo uim faciebat*” [She disquieted her Friend, did violence to heaven].

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- 1 See the story of the noble leper in Raine, *Reginaldi monachi dunelmensis libellus*, 37–41, wherein Æthelthryth is named, along with Cuthbert and Edmund.
- 2 The other collections are Szarmach and Huppé, *The Old English Homily and Its Background*, and Szarmach, *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*. For the continuing development of the field see now Kleist, *The Old English Homily*, particularly his opening observations, 1–2. See also now Magennis and Swan, *A Companion to Ælfric*.

I would like to thank Rolf Bremmer, Gabriella Corona, Kees Dekker, François Dolbeau, Thomas Falmagne, Tom Hall, Hugh Magennis, and Paola Moretti for their advice on specific issues. Jacqueline Stodnick, Paul Szarmach, and the anonymous readers working for the University of Toronto Press made many helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this article, for which I am very grateful.

- 1 Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*. Individual sections of this text are here referred to by feast day.
- 2 These include entries for the Crucifixion (25 Mar.), Ascension (5 May), and Pentecost (15 May), Rogation Days (placed between 3 and 5 May), Litanía maior (25 Apr.), the Summer Solstice (24 June), and the seven days of Creation (18–24 Mar.).
- 3 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*.” For an alternative scenario, see Lapidge, “Acca of Hexham and the Origin of the *Old English Martyrology*.”
- 4 Martyrologies were read out in the monastic chapter office daily and systematically, in linear fashion, and entry by entry, indicating the feasts of martyrs who were to be commemorated the following day. Usage of the *OEM* seems to have been of a different nature; see Rauer, “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*.”
- 5 LS, v–vi; Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 59–132. Ebersperger, *Die angelsächsischen Handschriften*, 138–9, lists the contents of Paris, BnF, lat. 10861; this legendary is also discussed in Brown, “Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 10861,” 119–37. For the general, “overwhelmingly male,” gender imbalance in western European hagiography, see Wilson, “Introduction,” in his *Saints and Their Cults*, 37–8.
- 6 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*.”
- 7 Ibid.; Cross, “A Lost Life of Hilda of Whitby,” 23. For other unsourced passages in the text, see Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 92–3; Rauer, “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 126, n. 6.
- 8 Foot, “Anglo-Saxon Minsters,” 222.
- 9 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 25–7; Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 2: 322–3.
- 10 “She built a monastery and became, by the examples of her heavenly life and teaching, the virgin mother of many virgins dedicated to God” (Bede, *HE* IV.19, 392). All translations from Bede in this chapter are taken from this edition. For another use of the theme “mater uirgo” see Blanton (chap. 9) and Black (chap. 8), below.
- 11 Both *minster* and *fæmne* are terms used very frequently by the martyrologist.
- 12 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*”; Cross, “A Lost Life of Hilda of Whitby,” 24–5; Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 2: 361.
- 13 “Where she was to live as mother and nurse of a company of women devoted to God” (*HE*, IV.6, 356–7).
- 14 In the Old English translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues* the phrase is used to refer to “monasterium uirginum”; Ælfric uses it to translate “monasteria

- puellarum” (*Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form A-G*, s.v. “fæmne,” 1.b.ii.a). Neither of the houses in question is an Anglo-Saxon one.
- 15 Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*; Foot, *Veiled Women*, 1: 26–30, 96–110.
- 16 See Roberts, Kay, and Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old*, 16.02.03.03.03. *Mynecenu*, used so frequently by Ælfric, is entirely absent from the *OEM*, as is the extremely rare *mynsturfæmne*. There are five instances of *sweostor* in the *OEM*, but none in the context of female monasticism.
- 17 The source is Fabricius, *Passio S. Matthaei*, 2: 654–65. The Old English phrase sounds like an interpolated gloss, “ane Godes fæmnan, þæt wæs an nunne,” but does occur in both branches of manuscript transmission and must therefore go back to the earlier stages of the text. For the Anglo-Saxon usage of *nunne* in general, see also the publications cited in n. 15.
- 18 Rauer, “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*.”
- 19 For exceptions, see Thecla (23 Sept.) and Felicity (23 Nov.), for example.
- 20 See, for example, Agnes (21 Jan.), Basilla (20 May), Lucia (25 June), Afra (8 Aug.), Mary Magdalen (22 July), Pelagia (19 Oct.), Eulalia (10 Dec.), and Lucia (13 Dec.).
- 21 To name a few more examples: Vitalis (28 Apr., “On ðone eahta ond twentegðan dæg ðæs monðes bið Sancte Uitalis tid þæs martyres”); Christopher (28 April, “On ðone ylcan dæg bið Sancte Cristofores ðrowung þæs miclan martyres”).
- 22 Roberts, Kay, and Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, 1: 16.02.04.16; Gneuss, *Hymnar und Hymnen*, 182–3; Godden, “Ælfric’s Changing Vocabulary,” 208–9; MacGillivray, *The Influence of Christianity on the Vocabulary of Old English*, 52–7; Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, 201.
- 23 LS 7.322, 188; Jayatilaka, “The Sources of Ælfric’s Lives 7 (St Agnes)”; Mombricitus, *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum*, 2: 570, l. 9.
- 24 Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 422; Hart, “The Sources of Bede,” 486.
- 25 Tertullian, *De anima*, 74.
- 26 Ehwald, *Carmen de Virginitate*, in Aldhelm, *Aldhelmi Opera omnia*, 352–471, l. 1877 (Justina), l. 2008 (Thecla), l. 2443 (Anatolia); Latham and Howlett, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin*, s.v. “martyra.” The word may have been coined by Aldhelm.
- 27 Gneuss, *Hymnar und Hymnen*, 183; von Lindheim, “Die weiblichen Genussuffixe im Altenglischen,” 496. Doubts remain because the word is difficult to read in the manuscript and because the author chooses to avoid a translation of the Latin *martyr* a few lines further on; see J. Campbell, “Prayers from Ms. Arundel 155,” 104–5, lines 6 and 11.
- 28 *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* and *Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form A-G*, s.v. “cybere”; see also Godden, “Ælfric’s Changing Vocabulary,” 208–9; Gneuss, *Hymnar und Hymnen*, 182.
- 29 *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, s.vv. “dryicge,” “scericge,” “scinlæce,” “sealticge,” and “synnicge”; *Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form A-G*,

s.vv. “byren,” “drycge”; Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*,” s.vv. “Agnes,” “Columba,” “Pelagia.” Bogislav von Lindheim, in “Die weiblichen Genussuffixe,” suggests that usage of Old English feminine suffixes may have been influenced by dialect, and it is interesting to note that the ?Anglian “sealticge” is in one manuscript of the *OEM* replaced by ? West Saxon “hleapestre,” which also seems to be a *hapax legomenon*; see Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 2: 192. For a more detailed survey of female vocabulary in the *OEM* and its relation to physical behaviour, see Chenard, “Narratives of the Saintly Body,” 121–68.

30 Cross, “A Lost Life of Hilda of Whitby,” 25.

31 Lapidge, “Acca of Hexham,” 54, n. 83.

32 Moretti, *Passio S. Anastasiae* (*BHL*, 118), 144.

33 Quentin, *Les martyrologues historiques du moyen âge*, 59, n. 2, “certaines rédactions martyrologiques dérivées de Bède ont remplacé cette notice au 3 des Nones,” and see also 423 and 481; di Grigoli, “Agape, Chione e Irene,” 1: 303–4; Dubois, *Le martyrologe d’Usuard*, 206–7, Agape and Chionia (3 April), Irene (5 April). I am grateful to Professor Moretti for pointing me in the direction of Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale

D.V.3.; this eighth-century manuscript from Corbie presents “tertio nonas aprilis,” fol. 171v. It is interesting that the same manuscript also omits the reference to the spinning fit of Irene’s tormentor, a motif which accounts for the saint’s untouchability, rationalized differently in the *OEM*; see Moretti, *Passio S. Anastasiae*, 61. The manuscript may belong to a tradition similar to that used by the martyrologist.

34 Lapidge, “Acca of Hexham,” 56.

35 Künstle, *Hagiographische Studien über die Passio Felicitatis*, 106–15. A second saint of the name Felicity and subsequent confusion of the two saints may be partly responsible for the second feast day.

36 See Cross, “The Latinity of the Ninth-Century Old English Martyrologist,” 276–99, for a list of errors formerly attributed to the martyrologist, most of which can now be traced to his source material. Christine Rauer, in “Old English *blanca* in the *Old English Martyrology*,” illustrates the disagreement, particularly between Cross and Herzfeld, in such cases. For a specific case concerning a female saint, see Cross, “A *Virgo* in the *Old English Martyrology*.”

37 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 96, n. 29; Moretti, *Passio S. Anastasiae*, 178.

38 No noteworthy spelling of “robustiolem,” which could give rise to confusion, can be found among the Continental manuscripts used for the edition by Professor Moretti, to whom I am very grateful for advice on this matter. The only surviving Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the *passio*, CCC 9 (presenting two copies of the text), 375 and 409, similarly fails to present an unusual reading.

39 Blair, “A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints,” 541; Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 1: 452, refers to “ein biographischer terminus a quo der in das frühe 8 Jh. verweist.” The reference to the translation of Aidan (31 Aug.), which probably occurred in the 940s, is thought to be a late interpolation

surviving in one branch of the manuscript tradition only; see also Blair, “A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints,” 510.

- 40 Levison, *England and the Continent*, 6, n. 4 (“about 800”); Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil*, 3: 455 (listed under “810”); van der Essen, *Étude critique et littéraire sur les vitae des saints*, 404 (“elles pourraient bien être antérieures à cette date de 820”); Levison, *Vitae Audomari, Bertini, Winnoci*, 741 (“Saeculo ergo IX. ineunte auctor attribuendus videtur esse”); Whatley, “Acta Sanctorum,” s.v. “Bertinus” (“written c. 800”). The oldest manuscripts of this composite *vita* are from the tenth century, *Société des Bollandistes: BHLms*, at <http://bhlms.fltr.ucl.ac.be>, accessed 22/01/2008, but see the above cited publication by van der Essen, 404, for a presumptive ninth-century manuscript of *BHL*, 763 now in St Petersburg.
- 41 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*.”
- 42 Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 1: 452, and 2: 347.
- 43 Lapidge, “Acca of Hexham,” 42–3, and Clayton, Review of Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 348. Cross rightly observed that the homily presents the closest parallel for the final sentence of the All Saints entry in the *OEM*, “se papa ða behead þæt æghwylce geare se dæg in Godes ciricum in Cristenum folcum wære on swylcre arwyrðnesse swylce se ærysta dæg in natale Domini, ðæt is ærysta Geohheldæg.” Cross also pointed out that no other source presents the comparison of the feast with Christmas Day, as the homily does (“Legimus in ecclesiasticis historiis,” 133). For the attribution of the “Legimus” sermon to Helisachar of Trier, see Cross, “Legimus in ecclesiasticis historiis,” 128; Dolbeau, “Le Breuiloquium de omnibus sanctis,” 1: 373; and Falmagne, *Die Handschriften des Grossherzogtums Luxemburg*, 1: 193–4.
- 44 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*”; for the date, see Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil*, 3: 454 (“ca. 770”), “Die Anfänge der lateinischen Literatur,” 127, and “Die älteste erreichbare Textgestalt der *Passio S. Afrae*,” 219; Whatley, “Acta Sanctorum,” s.v. “Afra.”
- 45 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*”; Saxer, “Santa Maria Maddalena,” 24; Hansel, *Die Maria-Magdalena-Legende*, 99, 128; Cross, “Mary Magdalen in the *Old English Martyrology*”; Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 37; Saxer, *Le culte de Marie-Madeleine*, 126.
- 46 Cross, “Mary Magdalen in the *Old English Martyrology*,” 20.
- 47 de Gaiffier, “Notes sur le culte de Sainte Marie-Madeleine,” 163–4; Hohler, “Theodore and the Liturgy” 5; Whatley, “Acta Sanctorum,” s.v. “Maria Magdalena.”
- 48 In an unpublished conference paper given at Kalamazoo in 1999, “Dating the *Old English Martyrology*: The Use of Hagiographical Sources,” I attempted to group the sources of the *OEM* into chronological periods; particularly problematic are not only the *passiones*, but the later variant redactions of such texts, whose usage has in many cases been traced to the martyrologist.
- 49 Indeed, one instance of the *Passio S. Afrae* (*BHL*, 108, 109) entering Anglo-Saxon England can perhaps be witnessed in the copy preserved in the Paris *passional* (Paris, BnF, lat. 10861, item 156), which may have been written

on the Continent by an English scribe; see Ebersperger, *Die angelsächsischen Handschriften*, 136, n. 395, and 139.

- 50 Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 1: 258–9; Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School*, 161–7; Hohler, “Theodore and the Liturgy.”
- 51 Rushforth, *Saints in English Kalendars before A.D. 1100*. For Anglo-Saxon litanies, see Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*.
- 52 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 98, and “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*.”
- 53 Whatley, “Acta Sanctorum,” s.vv. “Balthildis,” “Maria Aegyptiaca”; Magennis, *The Old English Life of Saint Mary of Egypt*, 12; Rauer, Review of Magennis, *The Old English Life of St Mary of Egypt*, 388.
- 54 For background, see Karras, “Holy Harlots; and Chenard, “Narratives of the Saintly Body,” 121–68.
- 55 Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 94, n. 20; Lapidge, “Acca of Hexham,” 34, n. 19.
- 56 Lapidge, “Acca of Hexham,” 39 n. 23.

- 1 Lees and Overing, "Anglo-Saxon Horizons," 21. While saints certainly particularized places in Anglo-Saxon culture, they did not, apparently, particularize place names in the way they did in Brittonic regions by means of compounds made up of a saint's name and *llan/lan*. The preference for topographical elements in English place-names, as well as the antiquity of many names by the time minster churches were founded, discouraged the formation of new religious toponymy (Blair, "A Saint for Every Minster?" 469–70). For an excellent review of the changing role of place in the cult of saints in western Europe from its origins until the eighth century, see Thacker, "*Loca sanctorum*," 1–43.
- 2 The effect of post-Romantic notions of originality in literary composition on the study of the genre of hagiography can usefully be compared to their effect on our understanding of the function of formulaic language in Old English poetry. See Tyler, *Old English Poetics*, especially chapter 3, "Formulas and the Aesthetics of the Familiar," 101–56.
- 3 As Thomas Hill observes, "Medieval literary hagiography has been relatively little studied from a literary viewpoint" ("*Imago Dei*," 35), because its aesthetic qualities have failed to be recognized as such.
- 4 Ibid., 36. Hill here makes a distinction between "primary" lives, "a text that is itself a primary written witness to the life and deeds of a medieval saint," and "secondary" lives, those written for established saints. However, I am distinguishing between collections of saints' lives and free-standing *vitae*; even though such free-standing lives often find themselves in close manuscript association with other *vitae*, independent lives are generally longer and more detailed than those within a collection. My synchronic approach to items across a collection contrasts longitudinal studies of a single saint, such as Rollason's *The Mildrith Legend*, or the essays collected in Stancliffe and Cambridge, *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*. A notable exception to the general tenor of work on hagiographic catalogue is Lifshitz's fascinating study, of the pseudo-hieronymian martyrology, *The Name of the Saint*.
- 5 Hill, "*Imago Dei*," 37.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 For more on the "catalogic" function of such list-texts, see my "Old Names of Kings and Shadows." My own work on catalogues here and elsewhere is indebted to Howe, *The Old English Catalogue Poems*.
- 8 A number of scholars have observed that Anglo-Saxon notions of place are primarily textual and therefore partake in the associative, narrative, or diachronic qualities of the written medium. Most significant here is the work of Howe, especially *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*; Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*; and the essays by Klein, Ulrike, Hollis, and Watt forming the second part, "Textual Locations," of Lees and Overing, *A Place to Believe In*. A recent important and nuanced consideration of the dimensions of medieval space and place is Foys, *Virtually Anglo-Saxon*, especially chapters 4 and 5.
- 9 Foys, *Virtually Anglo-Saxon*, 158, argues that the "reflected 'world'" of the

Cotton Map (fol. 56v of BL Cotton Tiberius B.v.), “is not one of logical order, but one of the conflict of perceived past and desired future, of classical and scriptural narratives struggling to occupy the same physical space, and of shifting and yet simultaneous notions of what defines the center and the edge of a world.”

- 10 *HE* I.i. All quotations in both Latin and translation are from the *HE*.
- 11 Hagiography thus works to promote what Anthony Smith has described as “an alleged and felt symbiosis between a certain piece of earth and ‘its’ community” (*The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 28). For the importance of an attachment to territory in the formation of ethnic community, see also his *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Contrast Smith’s focus on territory with, for example, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, which neglects the role of territory in the development of national identity.
- 12 James Cross makes this observation in “Source, Lexis, and Edition,” 26. The standard edition of *OEM* is Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*. Two earlier editions exist: Herzfeld, *An Old English Martyrology*; and Cockayne, *The Shrine*. For a full list of editions and translations, along with bibliography and discussion of manuscript history, see Christine Rauer’s invaluable *The Old English Martyrology*.
- 13 Martyrologies and calendars are related forms, and the *OEM* in particular shares a calendar’s combined focus on hagiographical and non-hagiographical material. Although technically a calendar may limit its entries to the feast days of the local church, whereas the entries in a martyrology will be more wide-ranging in extent, in practice this distinction is fluid. For discussion of the difference between these forms, see Kotzor, “Anglo-Saxon Martyrologists at Work,” 152–4; and for their similarities, see Rauer, “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 133.
- 14 Rauer, “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 131–3. For discussion of the differences between the *OEM* and Bede’s *Martyrology*, see Kotzor, “Anglo-Saxon Martyrologists at Work.”
- 15 Rauer, “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 144.
- 16 Like many such catalogue texts, although the *Martyrology* is often referred to as a singular text, it is more truly a composite and stands in an idealized relation to its existing manuscript witnesses. Two manuscript fragments, covering the dates 14–23 April and 2–10 May, respectively, survive from the late ninth century; two fuller versions were copied around the years 1000 and 1050; also in the eleventh century, entries for 25–31 December were added to the margins of a fifth manuscript. Günter Kotzor reconstructs the manuscript stemma and finds that at least three further copies (which he labels [Z], [X], and [Y]) must have intervened between the putative original and the surviving manuscripts (*Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 1: 143).
- 17 Lapidge, “Acca of Hexham.” In support of the early date, Lapidge notes (40) that the *Martyrology* commemorates no saints who died after the early eighth century and uses no securely dateable source later than Bede’s *HE*. This early date allows Lapidge to assign the Latin archetype to Bishop Acca of Hexham (who occupied the episcopal role from 709/10 to 731), a close associate of

Wilfrid and good friend of Bede and a figure who would have had access to a wide collection both of Latin collections of hagiographical material and of independent lives. For an earlier argument in support of an underlying Latin source, see Sisam, “An Early Fragment of the Old English *Martyrology*,” 212. James Cross notes of the *Martyrology*’s exemplar that it is “debatable whether that exemplar was originally a translation of a Latin martyrology” (“Legimus in Ecclesiasticis Historiis,” 132). No definitive evidence exists for such an archetype and nothing stylistically marks the Old English as being a translation of a single Latin work.

- 18 Rauer, “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*.” I am very grateful to Dr Rauer for sharing her essay with me ahead of publication. As Rauer explains, the eighth/ninth-century date was for a long time controversial because it was based solely on the sourcing of one entry, that for All Saints, by James Cross (“Legimus in ecclesiasticis historiis”). For the problems with using this entry to preclude a pre-800 date for the *Martyrology*, see Lapidge, “Acca of Hexham,” and Clayton’s review of Kotzor’s edition, 348. However, material used in the entries for Omer, Bertinus, and Winnocus, as observed by Kotzor, and for Afra and Mary Magdalen, as Rauer demonstrates in “Female Hagiography,” points to a similar date range, which convincingly suggests that the *Martyrology* was not composed before the late eighth century. Since the *Martyrology* compiler generally updates his text with new information, Cross also used the absence of dateable events, such as translations, as a criterion for dating; this method also confirms the eighth/ninth-century date. See his “The Use of a Passio S. Sebastiani,” 45 and n. 39.
- 19 Rauer, “Female Hagiography,” 15–16.
- 20 Ibid. In contrast Michael Lapidge sees the *Martyrology* as unrelated to Alfred’s program, although he notes that the king’s court forms an attractive possibility as a venue for its translation (“Acca of Hexham,” 31, 69). See also Rauer, “Usage of the *Old English Martyrology*,” 142.
- 21 Precise numbers are difficult to calculate because saints are often martyred en masse (for example, should the Forty Soldiers of Sebastea be counted as a single entry or as forty male martyrs?), or their martyrdoms are mentioned in an entry dedicated, strictly speaking, to another saint. Counting as single entries those of anonymous martyrs like the Forty Soldiers, while counting separately each named martyr regardless as to whether they have their own entry, yields mentions of 207 male and 56 female saints.
- 22 Erler and Kowaleski, “Female Sanctity,” 105.
- 23 Rauer, “Female Hagiography,” 3.
- 24 The male saints for whom post-mortem miracles are mentioned include Stephen, Ananias and Petrus, Vitalis, Peter and Paul, Symphorian, Bertinus, Omer, Justus, Quentin, Benignus, the Quattuor Coronati, Milus, Pope Clement I, and Chrysanthus. Since Chrysanthus and Daria are associated, miracles are referenced at their shared tomb. The entry for Mary Magdalen notes that “se mæssepreost hi bebyrgde, ond micle wundra wæron oft æt hire byrgenne” (ii.157.15–16) [the mass-priest buried her, and many miracles often happened at her tomb]. For the source for this section of the entry, which is a conflation, see Cross, “Mary Magdalen.” The *OEM*’s interest

in posthumous miracles, and place in general, is notably higher than that of Bede's *Martyrology*, which, although not a direct source for the *OEM*, is an interesting comparative within the genre. Bede mentions only one posthumous miracle – the healing of a blind man when the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius were brought into Milan – and includes none of the type of narrative episode linking male saintly body and place that I discuss below. For a translation of Bede's *Martyrology*, see Lifshitz, "Bede, *Martyrology*"; for bibliographical information for and discussion of the merits of editions of the primary text, see 174–5.

25 Thacker, "*Loca sanctorum*."

26 Ibid., 3. See also Caseau, *Sacred Landscapes*, 21-59; Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?"; J. Smith, "To Take Place," 74–95.

27 Thacker, "*Loca sanctorum*," 5–12. P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

28 Thacker, "*Loca sanctorum*," 8.

29 Ibid., 13.

30 For a discussion of theological opposition to the notion that places could be holy, see Cardman, "The Rhetoric of Holy Places," and, for a contradictory view, Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* For a discussion of the lack of biblical precedent for the concept of permanent sacred places see Japhet, "Some Biblical Concepts of Sacred Place." See Thacker, "*Loca sanctorum*," 11–12, for opposition to the claims made about the efficacy of secondary relics in establishing new holy places. Contrast the use of secondary relics to multiply sacred places with the notion of "place contagion" currently modifying Marian apparition and, as a consequence, "changing the mythical landscape of the Christian world." Visitors to apparition sites often carry away with them "a new habitus or way of being in the world that restructures existence in their more commonly frequented locales"; by a process of contagion, visitors sometimes return home with an ability to see the Virgin Mary, which subsequently also transforms the status of these sites (see Martin and Kryst, "Encountering Mary," 207, 208).

31 The *OEM* includes an example of such place-based miracles associated with Christ under the entry for his birth: "Pæt bæð pæt Sancta Maria pæt cild on bapode, þurh ðæt manige untrume men þæron wurdon gehælede" (ii.2.14–16) [Many unwell men were healed there by means of the water that Saint Mary bathed the child in]. My thanks to Christine Rauer for pointing out that "bæð" likely refers to the water used, and that any Modern English translation using the word "bath" changes the connotation of the original.

32 Thacker, "Martyr Cult within the Walls," 43.

33 I am grateful to Christine Rauer for bringing to my attention the importance of this particular constraint (personal communication).

34 Rauer notes that "seo stow ... nemnað nu wætlingaceaster" in the *OEM* translates "passus est autem ... uaeclingacaestir appellatur" in the *HE* ("The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*: Alban"). Omitted are the following sentences: "ubi postea, redeunte temporum Christianorum serenitate, ecclesia est mirandi operis atque eius martyrio condigna extructa. In quo uidelicet loco usque ad hanc diem curatio infirmorum et frequentium

operatio uirtutum celebrari non desinit,” [Here when peaceful Christian times returned, a church of wonderful workmanship was built, a worthy memorial of his martyrdom. To this day sick people are healed in this place and the working of frequent miracles continues to bring it renown] (*HE* I.7.34–5).

35 *HE* I.18.60–1; Thacker, “*Loca sanctorum*,” 31.

36 i.138.4–7: “a certain noble and very pious woman in Rome ... met one day two servants of God standing outside in foreign dress.” This entry, unlike many, acknowledges its debt to Gregory. Herzfeld correctly identified the source as Homily 32 in *Evangelia*, an attribution that was confirmed by Cross. For a complete bibliography see Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*: Processus and Martianus.”

37 ii.23.6–12: “not long after her martyrdom, she appeared to her parents in the middle of the night where they watched at her grave, and she said to them: Do not weep for me as if I were dead; but be happy for me, because I am united with Christ in the heavens whom I previously loved on earth.”

38 For sources, see Rauer, “The Sources of the *Old English Martyrology*: Agnes.” For the reference to the healing of Constantina, see Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 146. Because Agnes’s appearance is not construed in the text as a place-based miracle, I have not counted it as such in the tally of male and female posthumous miracles given above.

39 Cubitt, “Universal and Local Saints,” 435.

40 The *OEM* notes that both Agnes and Emerentiana were laid to rest in a church on the *via Nomentana*. That these saints were buried along a public thoroughfare indicates that their bodies were part of the religious and geographical framework of Christian Rome. This is not, however, the aspect emphasized by the *OEM* compiler in his choice of miracles to include in the entries for these saints.

41 ii.20.22 – ii.21.1–5: “Then the bonds burst apart and the lead fell from them, and they sent forth their souls to God, and the bodies came to the shore. There Christian men buried them with great honor, and there were afterwards in that place many miracles.”

42 ii.21.5–10: “And the prefect who commanded them to be killed, he was immediately visited with very great suffering, so that he would not live long; but he commanded his own men to throw him into the sea, and the sea-beasts immediately swallowed him so that not one of his bones came to the land again.”

43 ii.31.10, 11, 16–17: “deep pool,” “great and evil/harmful ice,” “his limbs all fell apart.” The version in Bede’s *Martyrology* does not emphasize the bodily integrity of the believing soldiers while in the pool, nor does it include the disintegration of the doubter’s body. Another example from the *OEM*, not involving water, in which the punishment of the pagan persecutor takes the form of unnatural bodily disunity is provided in the entry for Theodoret, in which the pagan judge dies while spitting “his innoð ut þurh his muð” [his innards out through his mouth] (i.43.6).

44 ii.197.15 – ii.198.1–2: “two pious women drew him from the water, and a

mass priest buried him.” The bodies of the Quattuor Coronati are also recovered from water, having been locked in leaden chests while alive and thrown in forty-two days earlier (ii.248–9). The treatment of Pope Clement I is similar. After he has been thrown into the sea with an anchor around his neck, the waters dry up and his body is found in a stone house miraculously prepared for the purpose by God. The church appears to be on a tidal island, since it is described as being in the sea three miles from land, and each year for one week a causeway appears (ii.255–6).

45 ii.242.8–14: “then the body immediately leapt up from the water and the head in another place ... And the woman honorably buried him, and all the unwell men who came there, they were immediately healed/whole.” Saint Chrysogonus’s head and body are similarly, if less spectacularly, reunited (ii.257).

46 ii.153.1–2: “that no man should see her but him alone.”

47 ii.154.8: “through martyrdom, she sent her soul to God in the kingdom of heaven.” Saint Eugenia, after her sojourn in the monastery disguised as a monk, is similarly tortured by being thrown into the Tiber with a stone attached to her neck. Like Christina, Eugenia survives her water torture – the stone bursts and she floats to land, only to be martyred – and the miracle does not therefore function to create a compelling link between the dead saintly body and the land, as it does for the male saints (ii.3–5).

48 ii.3–5, 210–11, 216–17, 66–7, 173–5, 261–2, 49–50, 107–8, 110–11, 141–4.

49 Horner, “Spiritual Truth and Sexual Violence,” 661, 664.

50 See also, for example, Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg’s essay comparing the instances of real life self-mutilation by nuns facing the prospect of rape and murder by Vikings with the violence inflicted on female bodies in hagiographical literature (“The Heroics of Virginity”).

51 As Shari Horner notes, as well as representing the process of exegesis, they also function as “a type of Christ ... a symbol of the Church ... as the soul battling the body; and as the virtuous obedient Christian” (“Spiritual Truth,” 662).

52 Lees, “Engendering Religious Desire,” 32. The play between treating the female saintly body as living or as dead is interesting, often working according to a logic of reversal. While hagiographical texts most often focus on the living but tortured body of female saints who are, in actuality, dead, other aspects of religious discourse represent or treat living female bodies as dead. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg describes how, in order to protect the nuns from invading forces, convents were moved from sites outside the city walls to locations inside, a move paralleling that of the dead bodies of the early martyrs (“Heroics of Virginity,” 44 and n.49). Schulenburg also notes that threats to the chastity of nuns were represented by the metaphor of grave robbery, with virginity figured as the precious treasure inside a burial mound (42).

53 I am influenced here by recent work done by Robin Norris in questioning the coherence of our modern categories of female sanctity (virgin martyr, virgin, prostitute saint, etc.). Elsewhere in this volume, Christine Rauer’s

comments on the Martyrologist's vocabulary for classifying female saints are also of relevance. As she observes, while the deaths of male and female saints are classified by the Old English term *martyrdom* over fifty times in the *OEM*, no female saint is described as a "martyr" ("Female Hagiography," 7). The Martyrologist instead refers to the majority of his female saints as "fæmne," [virgin] (ibid., 9), a term that emphasizes the collective importance of bodily purity in the making of female saints, rather than the contrasts between different categories of female martyr.

- 54 ii.7: "His tomb is among the Greeks in the town of Ephesus; at the tomb are a great many wonders seen and heard: sometimes it breathes as though a living man were sleeping, sometimes when someone examines the tomb, then no body is seen there, but there is a very sweet smell. Therefore no one knows whether John be alive or dead."
- 55 *HE* III.9.242–3: "Nor is it to be wondered at that the sick are cured in the place where he died, for while he was alive he never ceased to care for the sick and the poor, to give them alms, and offer them help." Similarly, Bede writes of the place where water, used to wash the king's body, was poured: "Nec mirandum preces regis illius iam cum Domino regnantis multum ualere apud eum, qui temporalis regni quondam gubernacula tenens magis pro aeterno regno semper laborare ac deprecari solebat" [It is not to be wondered at that the prayers of this king who is now reigning with the Lord should greatly prevail, for while he was ruling over his temporal kingdom, he was always accustomed to work and pray most diligently for the kingdom which is eternal] (*HE* III.12.250–1).
- 56 *HE* II.214–15: "Innumerable miracles of healing are known to have been wrought in the place where they prayed, doubtless as a token and memorial of the king's faith."
- 57 *HE* III.9.242–3: "Gradually so much earth was removed that a hole was made, as deep as a man's height." This detail of the hole is exactly paralleled in the description of Hædde's death-site later in the *Historia*: "in loco quo defunctus est ob meritum sanctitatis eius multa sanitatum sint patrata miracula, hominesque prouinciae illius solitos ablatum inde puluerem propter languentes in aquam mittere atque huius gustum siue aspersionem multis sanitatem egrotis et hominibus et pecoribus conferre; propter quod frequenti ablatione pulueris sacri fossa sit Ibidem facta non minima" [many miracles of healing happened on the spot where Hædde died, through the merits of his holiness. He said that the men of that kingdom used to take soil from the place and put it in water for the benefit of the sick, and both sick men and cattle who drank it or were sprinkled with it, were healed. As a result of the constant removal of the sacred soil, a hole of considerable size was made there] (*HE* V.18.514–15).
- 58 Thacker, "The Making of a Local Saint," 71.
- 59 *HE*, IV.3.346–7; Blair, "A Saint for Every Minster?" 490–4.
- 60 Blair, "A Saint for Every Minster?" 478–9.
- 61 *HE*, V.17.510–11; *OEM*, ii.85.
- 62 "deep hole"; (ii.68.3): "commanded that a waist-deep hole be dug, and he

ordered that the man of God be buried in the hole up to his waist, so that what was a rest to dead men should be a punishment to him while living. And then he survived in the hole for three days alive in praising God, and then he gave up the pure spirit" (ii.199.5–12). The similarity in diction between these two episodes, "deop" and "seað" being the words chosen in both, encourages the reader to make lateral connections between them.

63 Thacker, "The Making of a Local Saint"; Crook, "The Enshrinement of Local Saints."

64 Crook, "The Enshrinement of Local Saints," especially 206–24.

65 Martin and Kryst, "Encountering Mary," 224.

66 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 159.

67 Ibid., 160.

68 See, for example, Davis, "National Writing in the Ninth Century"; Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*.

- 1 Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St Margaret*, 3.
- 2 Ibid. Margaret was one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, a group of saints venerated since the fourteenth century for their particular effectiveness in intercession. In the calendar reforms of 1969, and the individual cults of Margaret, Barbara, Christopher, and Catherine of Alexandria were also suppressed at this time. In 2004 Pope John Paul II reinstated the status of Catherine of Alexandria.
- 3 Love, "Torture me, rend me, burn me, kill me!" Chap. 12 in this volume.
- 4 On the Benedictine reform see Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, 31–82; the introduction to Symons, *Regularis Concordia*, ix–xvii; Farmer, "The Progress of the Monastic Revival," 10–19; and John, *The King and the Monks*. See also the three millennial studies of the reform's leaders, Dunstan, Oswald, and Æthelwold: Yorke, *Bishop Æthelwold*; Ramsay, Sparks, and Tatton-Brown, *St Dunstan*; Brooks and Cubitt, *St Oswald of Worcester*; and the review article that analyses these three collections, Cubitt, "The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform in England." See also Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 346–54. For the later reform movement see Barker, Hinton, and Hunt, *St Wulfsgie and Sherborne*.
- 5 Stubbs, *Memorials of St Dunstan*, 41–2; quoted by Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, 252.
- 6 Brooks, *Early History*, 252. The Bosworth Psalter is London, BL, Add. MS 37517. On the Christ Church origin and date see Korhammer, "The Origin of the Bosworth Psalter," 173–87, and Rosenthal, "The Pontifical of St. Dunstan," 145, n. 14.
- 7 A situation obfuscated rather than clarified by post-Conquest chroniclers, who inconsistently report ejections of secular clerks; see Brooks, *Early History*, 255–66, and Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, 7–34.
- 8 Brooks, *Early History*, 265. The Arundel Psalter is London, BL, Arundel 155, recognized as the work of the Christ Church scribe Eadui Basan; see Pfaff, "Eadui Basan."
- 9 J. Hill, "Archbishop Wulfstan." See also Darlington, "Ecclesiastical Reform in the Late Old English Period."
- 10 Clayton and Magennis, *Life of Margaret*, 41–71.
- 11 For descriptions of this manuscript see Ker, *Catalogue*, No. 186, 240–8, where he dates it to the middle of the eleventh century. Helmut Gneuss dates the manuscript "from the second-half of the eleventh century onwards" ("Origin and Provenance of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts," 15). In my doctoral thesis I date the manuscript to 1012–23 ("Reconstructing a Deconstructed Manuscript," 48–65).
- 12 See Ker, *Catalogue*, No. 57, 99–105. The seventy-three text manuscripts can be divided into four sections, and the *Life of Margaret* is included in the second section among twenty-two homilies for saints' days from 3 May to 6 December.
- 13 Frank Barlow comments on the relationship between the dioceses of Canterbury in East Kent and Rochester in West Kent: "Post-Conquest

tradition is strong that the bishops of Rochester were under the patronage, if not the lordship, of the archbishops" (*The English Church, 1000–1066*, 221, and see his citations in n. 5).

14 Ibid., 211–12.

15 Robinson, "Old English Literature in Its Most Immediate Context," 11.

16 Liuzza has considered the importance of manuscript context for several different genres, including riddles, poetry, and prognostics ("The Texts of the Old English Riddle 30," 1–15; "The Old English Christ and Guthlac"; and "Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context"). Keefer has considered issues of manuscript context and editing with regard to liturgical poems ("Respecting the Book," 32–52). Szarmach examined manuscript context with regard to *Æðelflæd* of Merica in the Mercian Register ("Æðelflæd of Mercia").

17 T. Hill, "Imago Dei," 37.

18 On the *Old English Martyrology*, see contributions in this volume by Christine Rauer and Jacqueline Stodnick.

19 Gradon, *Cynewulf's Elene*; Woolf, *Juliana*.

20 Scragg, "The Corpus of Anonymous Lives," 215.

21 Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 57.

22 For a description of this collection and its use see Cooper, "The Homilies of a Pragmatic Archbishop's Handbook," 47–65. C.D. Wright comments that variant versions of Old English homilies should be appreciated in their own right as evidence of "revision by scribes or preachers who adapt homilies for new contexts and audiences"; see Wright, "Old English Homilies and Latin Sources," 15–66. On pastoral care in this period see these collections of essays: Tinti, *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*; and Blair and Sharpe, *Pastoral Care before the Parish*. On the debate of the organizational structure of the Church in this period see Cambridge and Rollason, "Debate," and Blair, "Debate: Ecclesiastical Organization." For references to editions of the homilies see Ker, *Catalogue*, 245–6.

23 For an edition of Ælfric's Homily for Palm Sunday see *CH II.14*.

24 For an edition of the Sunday Letter, see Napier, *Wulfstan, Sammlung iv*, 215m; Lees, "The Sunday Letter and the Sunday Lists." See now Haines, *Sunday Observance and the Sunday Letter*.

25 "Þæt we woldan a God lufian ⁊ on hine gelyfan ⁊ his bebodu healdan ⁊ deofol ascunian ⁊ his unlara georne forguban ... Utan gecyrran georne fram synnum ⁊ God biddan inweardre heortan þe he us gebeorge wið þone egsan" (Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, 226, 231). See Cooper, "Inculcating the Idea of Inner Heart."

26 In Paris, BnF, lat. 5574, the Devil's speech takes up "nearly thirty lines" (Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 37). In CCC 303 the Devil's speech covers two chapters, 15 and 16 (ibid., 164–7). See Lionarons, *The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan*, 16, 116–22. Lionarons identifies all the homilies after The Devil's Account as Wulfstan's, and framed by his Pastoral Letter with the exception of one that is based on Wulfstan's Penitential Edict but is probably not his direct work.

- 27 Cooper, "Lay Piety," 47–61. The first collection of confessional directives in T, fols 44r–56v, is concerned with the form of confession, including confessional prayers, the addresses and exhortations of the confessor to the penitent congregation, and the formulas for the correct procedures and demeanour of the confessional process.
- 28 For an edition see Wilson, *Pontifical of Magdalen College*, 70–2.
- 29 For a more recent and thorough examination of the development of the link between Margaret and pregnancy in the years after the Conquest see Larson, "Who Is the Master of This Narrative?"
- 30 Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, provides an edition of the two Latin birth prognostics based on the lunar calendar, which he numbers T5 and T21 (158–63), an English version, T15 (202–5), and the version that is incorporated in the general lunarium, T2 (124–47). See also Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900–1100*, 426–36.
- 31 Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, ed. as T14, 200–1. See also Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 223–9, where, at 227, he traces the source of this unique Anglo-Saxon text to Vindicianus's *Gynæcia*, but Liuzza argues that this is a misleading characterization because, of the numerous different versions of the fourth-century text to survive, none of them is like the one contained in T. Liuzza instead points to similarities to a closely similar Latin text in the eighth-century text from St Gallen, now incorporated in the composite manuscript Leiden University Library, Vossianus lat. Q.69, 36^v, and an anonymous text on the same subject in a tenth-century manuscript from Fleury, Paris, BnF, nouv. acq. lat. 1616, 12^r (Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 58).
- 32 "gif þam wife bið þæt hrif upastigen heo cenneð cynht. gif hit byþ nyþer asigen heo cenneþ mæden" (Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 212–13). Chardonnens notes some connections to Vindicianus's *Gynæcia* for this text (*Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 241–4), but this is again refuted by Liuzza, who argues that the "two texts can hardly be considered analogues" (*Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 58–9). The persistency of this particular method of predicting the gender of a child is such that in 1999 a team of obstetricians from Johns Hopkins University conducted a study that proved the notion to be a myth; see Perry, DiPietro, and Costigan, "Are Women Carrying 'Basketballs' Really Having Boys?"
- 33 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, 146.
- 34 HE I.27.88: "Si pregnans mulier debeat baptizari; aut postquam genuerit, post quantum tempus posit ecclesiam intrare." There has been much recent scholarly interest in rites of purification: Rieder, "Insecure Borders" and *On the Purification of Women*; Lee, "The Purification of Women after Childbirth" and "Men's Recollections of a Woman's Rite"; Pierce, "'Green Women' and Blood Pollution."
- 35 Scheck, *Reform and Resistance*, 77. Helene Scheck refutes Stephanie Hollis's argument that the ideas about purification were indigenous to the Anglo-Saxons and it was cultural interest in purification rites that led to Augustine's inquiry. See Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 24.

- 36 Theodore prescribes a period of forty days and nights for a ritual purgation, during which the woman must abstain from her husband; see McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 208.
- 37 Rieder, “Churching,” 140–1.
- 38 Ibid., 140.
- 39 “God, who measured the heavens with your hand and enclosed earth in your fist, hear my prayer that whoever writes out my passion or hears it read may from that time have his sins blotted out; and if anyone puts a light in my church [bought] from what he has earned, may the sin for which he asks forgiveness not be counted against him. I ask you, Lord, if anyone is found at the time of your terrible judgment and he is mindful of my name and of yours, deliver him, Lord from your punishment. I ask you further, Lord, that the person who makes a book of my martyrdom or has it in his house may have remission of all his sins, for we are flesh and blood and are always sinning and never ceasing. I ask you further, Lord, that to the person who builds a church in my name and writes out there [a copy of] my passion or buys one with what he has earned, you send, Lord, the Holy Spirit. And where the book of my martyrdom is [kept] may there not be born a child who is blind or lame or dumb or deaf or afflicted by an unclean spirit, but may peace be there and love and the spirit of truth. And to the person who asks there for forgiveness of his sins carry out, Lord, his prayer for him” (T, *Life of Margaret* §19; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 130–3).
- 40 Magennis, “Listen Now All and Understand,” 41.
- 41 Ibid., 42, 33.
- 42 Lewis, “The Life of St Margaret of Antioch,” 137.
- 43 Ibid., 141.
- 44 “Hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi conplacui” (Matt. 3:17).
- 45 “Cum, Margareta, to heofonum. Eadig eart þu, þu þe mægþhades gyrndest: for þon pingum þu eadig on ecnesse” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §18; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 130–1).
- 46 “And þær boc sy mines martyrhades, ne sy þær geboren blind cild ne healt, ne dumb, ne deaf” T, *Life of Margaret*, §19; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 132–3). This quote is given more fully in note 39, above.
- 47 “ne fand ic næfre on bocum þæt ænig man mihte to ece reste becuman, butan he on þa Halgan Brynnysse rihtlice gelifde, þæt is Fæder and Sunu and se Halga Gast, and þæt se Sunu onfeng mennisc hiw and geprowade deað for eall mankin... Blinde he onlihte, deafum he gesealde gehernysse” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §2; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 112–13). We see here the same kind of over-explanatory clauses that were inserted into the text of Ælfric’s Homily for Palm Sunday by the redactor of the version in T. See Cooper, “Lay Piety,” 47–61.
- 48 “Beatus venter qui te portavit et ubera quae suxisti” [Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck] (Luke 11:27).
- 49 “Loce on me and gemildsa me, Drihten, forþon þe ic ane eom herinne, and min fæder, he me forlet. Ne forlæt þu me, min Drihten, ac gemiltsa me” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §11; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 120–1).

- 50 “Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?” (Matt. 27:46).
- 51 “Ego vici mundum” (John 16: 33).
- 52 “Broþor, genim nu þin swurd and ofsleh me, forþon þe nu get ic oferswyþde þysne middangeard” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §22; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 134–5).
- 53 “Et haec est victoria quae vincit mundum: fides nostra. Quis est qui vincit mundum nisi qui credit quoniam Iesus est Filius Deus?” (1 John 5:4–5).
- 54 T, *Life of Margaret*, §7; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 116–17.
- 55 For a recent discussion of the meaning of brutal violence in Middle English *Lives* of Margaret see Lewis, “Lete me suffre.” Lewis discusses recent scholarly interpretations of violence in the lives of virgin-martyr saints as pornography and as displaced rape, but concludes that these approaches do not take into account the popularity of these *Lives* among women and the fact that, at their heart, they describe women engaged in active resistance to male authority.
- 56 T, *Life of Margaret*, §6; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 114–16. The version of Margaret’s *Life* in BnF, lat. 5574, is perhaps more explicit in this instance: “Domine, potestas tua non potest ei esse communis, quia non est seruiens diis nostris sed Deum inuocabat, et Christum quem Iudei crucifixerunt adorabat” [Lord, your power cannot associate with her, because she does not serve our gods but calls upon God, and she worships Christ, whom the Jews crucified]. See Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 196.
- 57 T, *Life of Margaret*, §6; Clayton and Magennis, *Life of Margaret*, 116–17. In the CCC 303 version, Olibrius asks his servants “‘On hwilca wisa ræde ge me hu ic muge þis mæden bismærian?’ And hi ealle þa swigedon” [How would you advise me to put this maiden to shame?] And they were all silent]. See Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 156.
- 58 “I questioned them as to whether they were Christians. Those that confessed I questioned a second and a third time warning them of the punishment that would follow: those who kept to their confession I ordered to be taken away for execution” (Pliny, *Letters*, Book X.96.3; see also 96.5–6). See Sherwin-White, *Fifty Letters of Pliny*, 69; and Radice, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, 293. Admittedly, Pliny’s *Letters* are not known to have been in any library in Anglo-Saxon England; nevertheless, the course of the trial that Pliny describes and Margaret’s ordeal are remarkably similar. See Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Libraries*, 128. See also Trajan’s reply to Pliny, Letter 10.97; Bennett, *Trajan Optimus Princeps*, 123–4; Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, 173–85.
- 59 When John Bugge addressed the same issue in the poem *Juliana*, he argued, “the real threat to her [Juliana’s] virginity is the devil rather than Heliseus” (“*Virginitas*,” 105).
- 60 Stubbs, *Memorials of Saint Dunstan*, lxxv, 329.
- 61 In her examination of the Early Middle English Seinte Margarete, Jocelyn Price points to the received tradition handed down through Isidore and other bestiaries that describe dragons originating in Africa and India. She quotes

from *De bestiis et aliis rebus*: “They are found in Ethiopia and India where the sun’s own heat provides a constant burning like summer. The devil, who is a very large serpent, can be compared with this dragon ... He does not have venom in his teeth but in his tongue, for, having lost his power, he deceives by his lies those whom he draws to himself ... He binds their legs with the coils of his tail and if he can, entraps them, because he strangles their journey to heaven in the knot of sin and he suffocates them to death, for whoever dies unrepentant in the grip of sin is certainly condemned to hell” (“The Virgin and the Dragon,” 343). We could further conclude that the Ethiopian or Indian location has engendered the idea of the second devil appearing in the guise of a black man.

- 62 “I sent my brother Rufus to you in the appearance of a dragon, in order that he would swallow you up and destroy your chastity and your beauty and expunge the memory of you from earth. You slew him then with the sign of the Christ’s cross and now you wish to slay me. But I ask you for the sake of your virginity that you not beat me” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §14; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 124–5).
- 63 T, *Life of Margaret*, §14; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 124–5. The CCCC 303 version: “Stop, you wretch, you cannot at all seduce my virginity” [Geswic þu earming, ne miht þu to nahte minne mægþhad]. See Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 162.
- 64 “Ic eom nu, Drihten, swa swa nytenu onmiddan felde and swa swa spærwe on nette and swa swa fisc on hoce” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §5; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 114–15).
- 65 “The devil was conquered by his own trophy of victory. The devil jumped for joy, when he seduced the first man and cast him down to death. By seducing the first man, he slew him; by slaying the last man, he lost the first from his snare ... The devil jumped for joy when Christ died; and by the very death of Christ the devil was overcome: he took, as it were, the bait in the mousetrap. He rejoiced at the death, thinking himself death’s commander. But that which caused his joy dangled the bait before him. The Lord’s cross was the devil’s mousetrap: the bait which caught him was the death of the Lord” (Bettenson, “St Augustine Sermons,” in *The Later Christian Fathers*, 261, 222). For discussion of this theme in the medieval period see also Schapiro, “Muscipula Diaboli,” 182–7 and Tull, *The Atoning Gospel*, 94. A more thorough examination of this idea in a later period is undertaken by Munk, *The Devil’s Mousetrap*.
- 66 Hulme, “The Old English Gospel of Nicodemus.”
- 67 “Then said Satan unto Hell: ‘Make thee ready to receive him whom I shall bring down unto thee.’ There upon Hell did make answer unto Satan thus: ‘This voice was nothing else but the cry of the Son of the most high Father, that the earth and all the places of hell did so quake at it: wherefore think that I and all my bounds are now wide open. But I adjure thee, O Satan, head of all evil, by thy might and mine own, bring him not unto me, lest when we would take him we be taken captive by him’” (James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 125 [Acts of Pilate, Latin B version III (XIX)]).
- 68 The appearance of a Cross of victory in the heavens has, of course, a

pedigree dating back to Constantine and his victory at Milvian Bridge in 312; by 350, after the discovery of the true Cross by Helena, Constantine's mother, Cyril of Jerusalem remarked on the appearance of a great cross of light over Golgotha at the Crucifixion. See Swanton, *Dream of the Rood*, 42, 43. The Anglo-Saxons had their own traditions of Cross apparitions, as witnessed by the poem *The Dream of the Rood* and the death vision of Hilda of Whitby (ibid., 46). See also Karkov, Keefer, and Jolly, *The Place of the Cross*.

- 69 Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 37. They also attribute other features of the *vita* to Marian imagery, including Margaret's being described as the ancilla of the Lord, the dove praising her as "Beata es inter mulieres." Mary was bodily assumed into heaven, and this is a rare attribute that Margaret shares in some versions of her *Life* (ibid., 14).
- 70 "And behold, the Lord Jesus Christ coming in the glory of the light of the height, in meekness, great and yet humble, bearing a chain in his hands bound therewith the neck of Satan, and also binding his hands behind his back, cast him backwards into Tartarus, and set his holy foot upon his throat and said: 'Throughout all ages hast thou done much evil and hast never been quiet at any time'" (James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 135).
- 71 "Speak to me, Margaret, you who through virginity desired the eternal kingdom, and for this reason it will be granted to you with Abraham and with Isaac, and Jacob. Blessed are you who have overcome the enemy" (T, *Life of Margaret*, §15; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 124–7).
- 72 T *Life of Margaret*, §1, 2, 20; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 112–13, 134–5.
- 73 See Cooper, "Reconstructing a Deconstructed Manuscript," 132–81.
- 74 Symons, *Regularis Concordia*, 32–46.
- 75 These reworkings of the Good Friday prayers from the *Regularis Concordia* into prayers for private devotion at any time occur in T at fols 58r–59r and 114r–115r. Two further examples of this type of prayer can be found in CCCC 391, the so-called *Portiforium of St Wulfstan*, on pages 609–11 and 611–16.
- 76 The second of these texts, at fol. 59rv, has, however, in traditional scholarship, been designated a "charm," not a prayer or devotion, which has resulted in a lack of appreciation for the quintet of texts as a protracted private devotion to the Cross. The supposed charm has far more in common with the text that precedes it, which is based on the Good Friday prayers, because of their common use of psalms and antiphons, than it does with other Anglo-Saxon charms and it should, therefore, be considered part and parcel of the same devotional scheme rather than as a separate and unrelated genre. There is another close parallel here with CCCC 391, which has a version of this charm immediately after its private Cross devotion based on the Good Friday prayers at 617–18. For a detailed discussion on this quintet of Cross devotions see Cooper, "Reconstructing a Deconstructed Manuscript," 132–81, and Liuzza, "Prayers and/or Charms Addressed to the Cross," 276–320.

- 77 By the late Anglo-Saxon period all three feasts – The Veneration, The Invention, and The Exaltation – were liturgically important; see *CH II.18.38–61*. Ælfric commemorated the feasts with homilies, and his homily for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross demonstrated not only the widespread distribution of Cross relics in the late Anglo-Saxon period, but also the presence of contemporary uneasiness about Cross idolatry: “It is, however, to be known that it – the cross – is widely distributed by means of sections to every land. But the spiritual significance is always with God, ever incorruptible, though the tree may be cut to pieces” (*LS 27.143–6, 153*).
- 78 T, *Life of Margaret*, §11; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 120–1.
- 79 T, *Life of Margaret*, §13; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 122–3.
- 80 “þær scan swiþe micel leoht on þæm þystran quarterne and Cristes rode wæs gesewen fram eorþan up oþ heofen” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §15; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 124–5).
- 81 “heo gebletsode eall hira lichoma mid Cristes rodetacene” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §17; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 128–9).
- 82 T, *Life of Margaret*, §20; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 132–3.
- 83 Ortenberg, “Archbishop Sigeric’s Journey to Rome, in 990.” Sigeric’s itinerary is recorded in BL Cotton Tiberius B.v., fols 23v–24v.
- 84 There are no indications on the manuscript of T that show this *Life* was divided into twelve, and so we have to assume that another manuscript was used for these twelve lections. Ælfric provided instructions for the reading of saints’ lives with responsories; see Jones, *Ælfric’s Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, 5–70. This is discussed by Hall, “Latin Sermons for Saints,” 227–63.
- 85 Gneuss, “Origin and Provenance,” 33.
- 86 The Waltham Abbey relics list, written in the mid-1340s, includes a gift to the abbey of “de zona Sancte margarete virginis” [the girdle of St Margaret]; given by Nicholas prioris Sancte Gregorii cantuarie, it was one of forty-six, including portions of the chasubles of the canonized archbishops Ælfheah and Dunstan and a strip of the belt that Thomas Becket was wearing when he was martyred (Rogers, “The Waltham Abbey Relic List,” 178).
- 87 The forged foundation charter for St Gregory’s, probably of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, claims that they were given, among other things, relics of the Anglo-Saxon archbishops. The charter is preserved in CUL, Ll. II. 15. See Woodcock, *Cartulary of the Priory of St Gregory*, Charter 1. For a recent discussion of the charter see Sparks, “St Gregory’s Priory.” Despite the forged nature of the foundation charter, such a donation would have been quite possible at the time of St Gregory’s foundation in 1085, because the remains of Dunstan and Ælfheah were above ground while the cathedral was being rebuilt. They were not to be reburied until 1130 (*ibid.*, 83). See also Ramsay and Sparks, “The Cult of St Dunstan at Christ Church,” 313–16.
- 88 The relic list for Bath was added to CCC 111 in s. xi²; as Clayton and Magennis argue, the relics themselves must have been there at an earlier date because the list is preceded by an account of the opening of the shrines by Abbot Ælfsige, who wanted to know what relics they held (*St Margaret*,

80). See also Hunt, *Two Cartularies of the Priory of Bath*, 3–4.

- 89 These are now preserved in London, BL, Stowe 944, in a twelfth-century hand, but they might represent earlier acquisitions. See Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 84 and Birch, *Liber Vitae Liber Vitae*, 152, 159.
- 90 The Old English list was added to a tenth-century Breton gospel book (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. D. 2. 16, in s.xi²), and the two Latin lists were included in the Leofric Missal (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 579; London, BL, Royal 6. B. VII). The same scribe who wrote both Exeter Latin relics lists also entered the St Margaret mass into the Leofric Missal in the third quarter of the eleventh century.
- 91 “The angels came and took her head into their embrace, and they sang, proclaiming, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, glorious King of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.’ And thus singing they placed it in paradise. And all who were ill, the lame and the blind, the dumb and the deaf, when they touched the body of the holy maiden, they were all healed” (T, *Life of Margaret*, §23; Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 136–7). T is not unique in this reference to the assumption of Margaret’s head: the Casinensis version (BHL, 5304) also has this feature (Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 233).
- 92 “taking up the body of the blessed Margaret in their embrace they ascended above the clouds” [tollentes corpus beatae Margaritae in gremio suo ascenderunt super nubem] (Clayton and Magennis, *St Margaret*, 216).
- 93 See *ibid.*, 170.
- 94 “Nu þonne fram anre gingre fæmnan ic eam oferswiþd” (*ibid.*, 126).

- 1 This chapter uses the adjective *chaste* to refer to persons who have never experienced coitus and to persons who have made a commitment to celibacy. It uses the noun *chastity* similarly. In its examination of the lives of Martin and Eugenia, this chapter also uses the term *virgin* in accordance with conventional translations of Ælfric's saints' lives. For further discussion of the distinction and overlap of these two terms, see Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity*, 3–7.
- 2 *LS* 2 (Eugenia); 31 (Martin). Ælfric, *CH* II.34, also wrote a shorter life of Martin. For a discussion of the manuscript history and circulation of *LS*, see J. Hill, "The Dissemination of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*."
- 3 Jo Ann Kay McNamara's historically specific studies on how the call by the church for chastity affected the meaning of masculinity and femininity support the analytical approach adopted in this essay (see *Sisters in Arms*; "The *Herrenfrage*"). In turn, this examination of Ælfric's lives of Martin and Eugenia provides further support for McNamara's attention to the central role chastity plays in establishing and re-establishing a gender system.
- 4 Scheide Library, Princeton University M 140 (S 1497). A facsimile is available in Keynes, *Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 15. A facsimile, edition, and translation, as well as extensive analysis of the document, are available in Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*. An edition and translation (based on Whitelock's) also are available in Crick, *Charters of St Albans*, 144–51. Crick (*ibid.*, 39–45, 92–4, 152–3, 159–60) and Lowe ("Latin Versions of Old English Wills," 10–15) detail the complex history of this extant will and other documents related to the will. The extant will is a single-sheet parchment copy. What is not clear is whether it is a copy contemporary with Æthelgifu's will, leaving the dates of the original will and this single-sheet parchment copy unclear. As Crick outlines, the will could have been made as early as the 950s and the single-sheet parchment copy could have been made as late as the early eleventh century (*Charters of St Albans*, 152–3). For ease of discussion, the chapter will consistently refer to the extant single-sheet parchment copy as Æthelgifu's will.
- 5 *LS* Preface, 7–9.2; 35–45.4. For an extensive discussion of Ælfric's connections to and influence on aristocrats, ealdormen, and local gentry, see Cubitt, "Ælfric's Lay Patrons."
- 6 Ælfric's sources for *LS* Martin include Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Sancti Martini*, *Epistulae*, and *Dialogorum Libri Tres* as well as Alcuin's *Laudationes* and Gregory of Tours's *Historia Francorum*. For further discussion of Ælfric's sources, see Biggs, "Ælfric as Historian"; Zettel, "Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources," and "Saints' Lives in Old English." Zettel discusses the mid-eleventh century Cotton-Corpus legendary, CCC 9, and surmises that a similar collection comprised Ælfric's source text. For an extensive bibliography of scholarship on Martin, see <http://www.saintmartindetours.eu/reseauscientifique/bibliographie/bibliographie.html> (accessed 25 April 2012).
- 7 Others persuasively have commented, by reference to his sources and his other writings, how Ælfric develops a hagiographic style that de-emphasizes

historical context and biographical detail while he magnifies the sanctity of the saints' lives. See Godden, "Experiments in Genre"; Magennis, "Warrior Saints." Paul E. Szarmach, characterizes Ælfric as an author and demonstrates his stylistic experiments based on his study of the manuscript evidence of Ælfric's two lives of Martin ("Ælfric Revises").

- 8 LS 31.16–22.220 (trans. 221). John Damon has concluded that, although warfare had a significant role in Roman society, soldiers represented a distinct class taken from "those members of society on the fringes of respectability" (*Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors*, 275). As Damon further suggests, warfare may have played a more central role in the life of Anglo-Saxons than it did in Roman society (*ibid.*).
- 9 Magennis, "Warrior Saints," 33.
- 10 LS 31.42.222 (trans. 223).
- 11 Magennis, "Warrior Saints," 36.
- 12 Damon analyses all of the lives of Martin written during the Anglo-Saxon period (*Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors*, 250–74). He demonstrates that Ælfric, who wrote his lives subsequent to the others, comes closest to "Sulpicius's image of Martin as the unwilling, saintly soldier" (251). Damon further suggests that Ælfric's earlier and shorter life reflects a greater opposition to warfare than does his longer life, which Ælfric wrote, "while the war with the Danes worsened and as he came more and more often to be addressing his works to the very men charged with prosecuting the war" (268).
- 13 For further discussion of the making and remaking of medieval masculinity and why any single definition of it would inadequately capture how various groups and individuals at different times negotiated its meaning and import, see Cohen and Wheeler, "Becoming and Unbecoming" xiii; Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 3–12.
- 14 LS 31.31–6.220–2.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 45–50.222 (trans. 223): "He had modest patience, / and true humility above man's measure. / He had as great temperance in his food / as if he had been a monk rather than a soldier; / and for his noble qualities all his fellow-soldiers / revered him with a marvellous love."
- 16 *Ibid.*, 294–309.238 (trans. 239): "He was just in judgement, and devout in preaching, / venerable in manners and vigilant in prayers, / constant in reading, steadfast in his look, / virtuous in desire, and reverent in his duties. / Oh! what benignity was in his sayings, / and what excellence was in his manners, / and how great gladness in spiritual works / dwelt in the Saint with lofty perfection! / Blessed was the man in whom dwelt no guile; / he condemned no man, neither did he repay to any / evil with evil; but meekly endured / the injuries of men with great patience. / No man ever saw him ever so little angry, / nor murmuring in mind nor evilly disposed, / but ever continuing in one steadfastness / above man's measure with great gladness."
- 17 *Ibid.*, 106.226.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 103–17.226 (trans. 227).
- 19 *Ibid.*, 527–47.252–4.

- 20 Ibid., 1066–102.286–8.
- 21 Ibid., 1074.286 (trans. 287). McNamara uses this incident among others to demonstrate how the Church Fathers “disapproved of the presence of women in what they defined as male space” (*Sisters in Arms*, 56).
- 22 LS 31.1085–8.286 (trans. 287).
- 23 Ibid., 1090–1.286 (trans. 287).
- 24 For a discussion of superiority over women as a basis for manhood, see McNamara, “The *Herrenfrage*,” 4–6.
- 25 Olsen, “‘Beggars’ Saint But No Beggar.”
- 26 Ibid., 470.
- 27 Emma Pettit supports a reading that Ælfric’s Martin expands, but only within a circumscribed set of criteria, the definition of manliness (“Holiness and Masculinity”). She argues that *religiosae* “did not have to act like men in order to achieve holiness” and, in fact, imported their familiar roles into the monasteries (18). On the other hand, *religiosi* “made a more significant break with their secular lifestyle because they were released from military service” (ibid.). Monastic life had more feminine than masculine features. When Aldhelm shows *religiosi* as stronger and more able than women, he was reassuring them, according to Pettit, that they “were still masculine and that the spiritual life of the cloister presented an alternative, yet equally authoritative form of masculinity” (ibid). As Aldhelm does, Ælfric broadens the range of manly behaviour for Christian men at the same time as he reinforces male authority and superiority.
- 28 Michael Lapidge demonstrates that the Cotton-Corpus legendary, CCCC 9, also seems to be a source text for Ælfric’s life of Eugenia (“Ælfric’s *Sanctorale*,” 123). Ælfric assigns Eugenia 25 December as her feast day, which corresponds to the date found in the Cotton-Corpus legendary, but is at variance with other Anglo-Saxon calendars.
- 29 This chapter’s interrogation of the *ideal monk* builds on scholarship concerning the history of masculinities and gender performance. See, for example, Butler, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*; Mangan, *Staging Masculinities*.
- 30 LS 2.95–6.30 (trans. 31).
- 31 LS 31.297.238 (trans. 239).
- 32 Jonathan Walker compares the role of virginity in the lives of male saints, non-transvestite saints, and female transvestite saints (“The Transtextuality of Transvestite Sainthood,” 102–4). In his discussion of transvestite saints’ lives as a sub-genre of saints’ lives, he views the attention to virginity as the means by which the saints’ lives contain the dangers raised by a woman’s appearing as a man: “as long as the writer conveys the saint’s ‘natural’ or ‘real’ sex, especially in gender-specific descriptions like ‘virgin’ that the medieval Christian reader would presumably value, appearances can be dramatically manipulated without endangering that reader’s knowledge of ‘reality.’ Indeed, because the reader has access to the ‘reality’ of the saint’s anatomical sex, any manipulation of appearances within this genre will tend to consolidate that reality and the woman’s position within it” (97).

33 Roy, "A Virgin Acts Manfully."

34 Ibid., 8.

35 Fábrega Grau, *Pasionario Hispánico*, 6:2.91–2; Roy, "A Virgin Acts Manfully," 9: "I did not wish to be a woman. For I considered the pretence by which a woman pretends to be a man not to be injurious of honour. But this is rightly to be punished if with a desire for vices a man feigns to be a woman. And this is rightly deserving of praise if for the love of virtues the weaker sex imitates manly glory." Roy provides a detailed comparison of the several extant Latin versions of the life of Eugenia regarding this passage and related ones (7–12).

36 Magennis, "Contrasting Features," 319.

37 *LS* 2.227–32.38 (trans. 39): "Eugenia, the noble woman, / said that she had desired to keep herself secret, / and to preserve her purity to Christ alone, / living in virginity, unknown to man, / and therefore at the first had assumed the robes / of a man's garb, and had had her hair shorn."

38 Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, 148.

39 Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough," 467.

40 Ibid., 462.

41 The presence of Protus and Jacinctus in the life of Eugenia raises a question of the influence that eunuchs as a concept may have had in Anglo-Saxons' understanding of gender and holiness. For further discussion of this issue, see Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati*; Tompkins, *The Eunuch and the Virgin*. Kathryn Ringrose observes that Eugenia and her companions occupy a "nebulous place outside a conceptual scheme that linked gender and procreation and was male oriented" ("Living in the Shadows," 93). The issue of whether a third sex emerges may be debatable. The crucial point is that eunuchs and the cross-dressing women associated with them decentred the male/female dyad upon which gender hierarchy depends. See Tougher, "Holy Eunuchs!" 96 (emphasizing that "what is at issue in holiness is asexuality, lack of gender" and that cross-dressing saints are simultaneously virgins, eunuchs, and men vanquishing sexuality, which gives them a triple claim to holiness). But see Walker, "The Transtextuality of Transvestite Sainthood," 96 (arguing that the presence of a eunuch "avert[s] the accrual of power that accompanies the women's status gain and assert[s] a compensating status" and, in addition, it stresses "that the cross-dressed women unmistakably lack penises").

42 The role of eunuchs in the life of Eugenia supports a multi-layered interpretation of the moment when Eugenia bares her breasts. It may have other connotations of virginity beyond the purity of her heart. Apparently, according to Peter Tompkins, some cloistered women applied hot grease to their breasts and tied them tightly for several weeks (*The Eunuch and the Virgin*, 149). With the mammary glands destroyed, these women had only empty sacks in place of breasts. It is possible, given that Eugenia presents herself as a man at the monastery, that her disrobing reflects her physical desexualization, not just her spiritual desexualization. Ælfric, in accordance with church orthodoxy, which rejects self-mutilation, would not have

wanted his readers to have contemplated this possibility (143).

43 Nothing in the story suggests that the monks believed that Eugenia too was a male eunuch. In contrast, another cross-dressing saint, Euphrosyne (*LS* 33.141.344), whose life Ælfric does not take up, presents herself as a eunuch at a monastery. The life of Euphrosyne, as discussed by Joyce Hill in “The Dissemination of Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*” (235–6), is one of four lives not written by Ælfric, but is included in the most complete manuscript containing Ælfric’s *LS*. For further analysis of the life of Euphrosyne, see Magennis, “Contrasting Features,” and Szarmach, “St. Euphrosyne.”

44 *LS* 31.574–84.256.

45 But see Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, 76, 76–9 (describing the breast as a “marker of the female” in his analysis of Ælfric’s lives of Agatha and Eugenia).

46 *LS* 8.

47 *Ibid.*, 29–31.196 (trans. 197): “stones may soften, and hard iron / become like lead, or ever the faith / in Agatha’s breast can be extinguished.”

48 *Ibid.*, 126–7.202 (trans. 203): “I have my breast sound in my soul, / with which I shall at any rate feed my understanding.”

49 *Ibid.*, 138–46.204. Allen J. Frantzen, in his analysis of the life of Agatha elaborates on the disembodiment of her femaleness and the emergence of *imitatio Christi*: “When she is restored to womanhood, we supposedly see that sexual identity is irrelevant to sanctity: breasted or unbreasted, Agatha is true to the faith. But sexual identity is in fact central to her story, for she has transcended the female body and become, however briefly, like a man. Thereafter she can once again be a woman, for now female secondariness is replaced by male secondariness – human secondariness – in the obliteration of human identity and the achievement of true holiness” (“When Women Aren’t Enough,” 462).

50 *LS* 27.

51 *Ibid.*, 190–1.156 (trans. 157).

52 Clare Lees agrees with the analysis in the text when she says in her discussion of Eugenia that “the woman-as-man is unveiled, unclothed, her flesh on view against her will, not as a sign of fallen humanity but of the redeemed sexed body” (*Tradition and Belief*, 150). However, Lees goes on, as part of her discussion of other women saints, including Eugenia, to conclude that “these saints, seemingly represented as not-sexual, not-women, even not-human, in fact remain female, sexed, and human, especially at moments of transcendence”; for Lees, the “breast remains a sign of her sex” (*ibid.*).

53 *CH II.6.132–3.56.*

54 *CH II.6.136–42.57.*

55 *CH I.9.198–9.255*: “There are three states that bear testimony of Christ: that is virginity, and widowhood, and right marriage.”

56 *CH I.9.204–7.255*: “Virginity is both in men and in women. They have true virginity who from childhood remain in purity, and despise in themselves all lust, both of mind and body.”

- 57 Weber et al., *Biblia sacra iuxta uulgatam uersionem*; Challoner, *Holy Bible, Douay-Rheims Version*: “Watch ye: stand fast in the faith: do manfully and be strengthened.”
- 58 CH I.12.112–7.279: “Five thousand men were counted at that feeding, for those men who belong to the spiritual feast ought to be manfully made, just as the apostle said: he said, ‘Be vigilant and stand on faith, and undertake manfully, and be confident.’ Though if a woman be manfully constituted, and strong to God’s will, she will then be numbered among those men who sit at the table of God.”
- 59 Hurst, *Bedae Venerabilis Opera, Part III: Opera Homiletica*, CCSL, 122:2.2.154–5.
- 60 Roy, “A Virgin Acts Manfully,” 7.
- 61 CH I.12.117.279.
- 62 Dorothy Whitelock reasons, based on related documentary evidence, that Æthelgifu was the widow of the thegn Æthelric, although she acknowledges some uncertainty (*The Will of Æthelgifu*, 25–6). A further uncertainty is whether Æthelgifu died childless. Julia Crick (*Charters of St Albans*, 99) and Whitelock (*The Will of Æthelgifu*, 29) speculate that Æthelgifu’s most favoured private beneficiary, Leofsige, may have been her son or grandson, based on the nature of the property and the form of gifts received. In addition to other evidence, they point out that he is the only private beneficiary to receive estates that likely came to Æthelgifu from her family and also from her husband. The strongest argument against Leofsige’s being Æthelgifu’s descendant is that her husband’s kinsmen, as documented in the will (Whitelock, 15–17), waged a strong challenge against Æthelgifu’s title to one of her estates. If they knew that a significant portion of that property would be passing to her husband’s son or grandson, it would seem unlikely that they would have acted in such an antagonistic manner toward her. In fact, their legal attacks would seem to support the hypothesis of Andrew Wareham, found in “The Transformation of Kinship and the Family,” 375–99, 390–2, and 392, n. 55.
- 63 Fell, with Clark and Williams, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, 44–5, 48, 76, 86, 97, 103, 106 (frequently mentioning Æthelgifu’s will in a discussion of legal rights and social standing of Anglo-Saxon women); Foot, *Veiled Women*, 1:2 (marshalling evidence from Æthelgifu’s will to investigate “the female expression of the religious life” during the late Anglo-Saxon period).
- 64 See, for example, Arenberg Gospels, *Crucifixion*, 869, fol. 9v (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library); Ramsey Psalter, *Crucifixion*, BL, Harley 2904, fol. 3v; Sherborne Pontifical, *Crucifixion*, BnF, lat. 943, fol. 4v. Barbara Raw elaborates on the “very restricted range of iconographies used in tenth- and eleventh-century English art” and concludes that it “must have been the result of deliberate choice” (*Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, 3).
- 65 Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, 95–6.
- 66 Adrien, *Sancti Ambrosii Mediolanensis Opera* CCSL, 14:10.1250–4, 383, quoting Psalm 44.2; Riain, *Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, bk.10, 352 (hereafter cited as Ambrose,

Commentary): “Christ, on the Cross, was making His last will and testament. John put his signature to the will – noble witness to a noble Testator. This was indeed a good testament that our Lord made, for He bequeaths not money, but life; and He writes not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God. *My tongue is the pen of a scribe writing swiftly.*”

- 67 Bede also wrote a commentary on Luke, *Expositio in Lucam*; see Hurst, *Beda's Venerabilis Opera, Part II: Opera Exegetica* 3. For a discussion of the publication history of Bede's exegesis on Luke and his sources, which include Ambrose's commentary, see Gorman, “Source Marks and Chapter Divisions,” 246–90.
- 68 Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, 99.
- 69 Ambrosius, *Sancti Ambrosii Mediolanensis Opera*, 14:2.69–73, 32.
- 70 *CH* I.30.40–6.430: “The Lord, by his graciousness, committed the blessed maiden his mother to the chaste man John, who had lived always in pure virginity, for which he was especially dear to the Lord, so very much that He would entrust to him that precious treasure, queen of all the world: surely so that her most pure virginity might be associated with that pure man, with acceptable fellowship in pleasant habitation.”
- 71 Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 15, 14 (trans.). Except as otherwise noted, italics in the Old English version of the will reflect an expansion of abbreviations used by the scribe.
- 72 For a discussion of the cult of the Virgin in Anglo-Saxon England, see Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*.
- 73 Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 13, 12 (trans.): “and Ælfwaru ... [is to be freed] on condition that she sing four psalters every week within thirty days and a psalter every week within twelve months, and Leofrun is to be freed on the same conditions, and Æthelflæd.”
- 74 Reasons that a priest among Æthelgifu's household made it easy for her to take confession and receive the Eucharist (Foot, *Veiled Women*, 1:179). In her will, Æthelgifu makes gifts to four priests, Edwin, George, Æthelweard, and Boga (Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 15–17, 54–5, 55–6, 56–7, 9, 13–15).
- 75 Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 34. Sarah Foot further supports the view that Æthelgifu had taken vows when she conjectures that the “heafodgewædo,” which Æthelgifu bequeaths, may refer to a veil, in accordance with the Old English translation of Genesis that uses heafodgewædo for the Latin term for veil, *velamen* (*Veiled Women*, 1:140, citing Whitelock, 12, n. 10). Foot discusses how “there were two distinct categories of religious woman in the English Church” during the tenth century (1:140). Æthelgifu's will provides evidence of the category of religious woman who lived outside the cloister, a secular vowess called nunne. Her counterpart who lived cloistered was known as a mynecen(u). Although both categories of religious woman were present throughout the tenth century, Foot concludes that the monastic reform of the late tenth century, with its emphasis on cloistered life, made the distinction between the two categories of religious women necessary (1:142). For further discussion of the two types of religious woman, see Yorke, “Sisters under the

Skin’?” 108.

76 Foot, *Veiled Women*, 1:123–6.

77 For a description of the various versions of Æthelred II’s laws and the role of Archbishop Wulfstan, see Whitelock, Brett, and Brooke, *Councils and Synods*, 1:1.338–43.

78 Ibid., 1:1:355 (Code 21, 21.1).

79 Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 34.

80 Joyce Salisbury explains how Church Fathers prescribed that prayer and study occupy a virgin’s day and how silence should be maintained (*Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, 35–6).

81 Carlson and Weisl, “Introduction: Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity,” 4–5. Salisbury, in her study of women saints who reflect the eastern ascetic tradition, makes a similar point when she concludes that ‘the prevailing image of chastity for women was freedom. With the initial choice of freedom from sexual intercourse, other freedoms seem to come as well’ (*Church Fathers*, 119).

82 *CH I*.116–17. 279. Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, emphasize the importance of chastity when they write that “between the world of the spirit and the world of the flesh chastity was the great divide. No other virtue – not humility or poverty or charity – was so essential to either the performance or the perception of a holy life” (*Saints and Society*, 73).

83 Ambrosius, *Sancti Ambrosii Mediolanensis Opera*, 14:7.65–9, 216, quoting John 19:26–7; Ambrose, *Commentary*, bk. 7, 194: “Be a Son of the Church, and you will be a Son of Thunder. To you too Christ will say from His Cross: ‘Look, this is your Mother,’ and to the Church He will say: ‘Look, this is your son.’ When you have contemplated Christ triumphant on the Cross, then you will begin to be a son of the Church.”

84 Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 7, 9, 6 (trans.), 8 (trans.).

85 Ibid., 7, 9–11.

86 Roberta Gilchrist argues that Anglo-Saxon women’s “desire for spiritual salvation caused them to reproduce the structural gender relations of medieval society through their own agency” (*Gender and Material Culture*, 15).

87 Whitelock, *The Will of Æthelgifu*, 9 (emphasis added), 8 (trans., emphasis added): “and the land at Standon [is to be given to] Leofsig; ... for his lifetime; and after his lifetime it is to be given to Ælfwold; and after their lifetime, to St Albans. And they are to sing *for her and for her lord’s soul* thirty masses and thirty psalters every year, and the monks are always to have the use of it in common.” In line 28, the scribe made a correction interlineally to *sawle*.

88 Ibid., 15, 14 (trans.).

89 Ibid.

90 *CH I*.12.116.279.

My work benefited enormously from the insightful comments of all the participants of the 2006 NEH Seminar, “Holy Men and Holy Women in Anglo-Saxon England.” Particular thanks go to Paul E. Szarmach and Jacqueline Stodnick for commenting on drafts of this chapter.

- 1 Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, and “Centralism and Uniformity.” For a detailed view on how the reformers figured a masculinized virginity, see Cubitt, “Virginity and Misogyny.”
- 2 Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, 131–5.
- 3 Clayton, “Centralism and Uniformity,” 103. For the connection of St Peter to the reform, see Cubitt, “Images of St. Peter.”
- 4 Clayton, “Centralism and Uniformity,” 102–3.
- 5 Although there are a variety of Marian relics in the eleventh century in England, these are mostly parts of her vestments, her sepulchre, or her milk, not body parts, as in the case of Æthelthryth. For a discussion of Marian relics in England, see Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, 138–9.
- 6 For a discussion of the importance of location and relics, see the chapter by Jacqueline Stodnick in this volume.
- 7 Clayton, “Centralism and Uniformity,” 103.
- 8 For the connection between the coronation of the Virgin and the coronation of Ælfthryth, see Deshman, *Benedictional of Æthelwold*, 204–7. Although eminent historians such as Nelson and Stafford accept that Ælfthryth was consecrated queen in 973, Karkov claims that this cannot be stated definitively (*Ruler Portraits*, 112).
- 9 For a discussion of this miniature see Deshman, *Benedictional*, 124–36, with illustration at Figure 34.
- 10 Clayton, “Centralism and Uniformity,” 105.
- 11 For a discussion of Ælfric’s adaptation of the *Life* of Basil for this homily, see Corona, *Ælfric’s Life of St. Basil*, 51–73.
- 12 “Assumptio Sanctae Mariae Virginis,” in *CH I*.429–38. This homily will be cited throughout as “Assumptio.” All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. This edition of the *Catholic Homilies* is known for unusual punctuation that is difficult to reproduce with modern word processors. Accordingly, I have replaced the *punctus elevatus* with a colon and have silently expanded common abbreviations.
- 13 For a re-evaluation of Ælfric’s role in the reform, see Jones, “Ælfric and the Limits of the Benedictine Reform.”
- 14 For a modern edition of the *Cogitis me*, see Ripberger, *De assumptione sanctae Mariae Virginis*. Both the *Cogitis me* and the *Life of Basil* will be cited in the abridged form in which they appear in *CH III*.248–56.
- 15 Morris, *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, 137–59. The textual history of the *Transitus B* has been outlined by Mary Clayton in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, 33–5. See also Clayton, *Apocryphal Gospels of Mary*, 83–9.
- 16 Lees, *Tradition and Belief*.

- 17 Gransden, "Traditionalism and Continuity." For the importance of the Continent on the Benedictine Reform, see Wormald, "Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts."
- 18 Nichols, "Ælfric and the Brief Style." For a discussion of how Ælfric manipulates these formulae, see Stanton, *The Culture of Translation*, 145–53.
- 19 Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, 28–9.
- 20 For a discussion of Ælfric's adaptation of this source, see Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, 235–44; and *CH III*.248–56.
- 21 *CH I*.30.25–7, 430: "lest the lying text, which is widely disseminated by the heretics, should come into your hands, and you receive the fictitious lies as truth."
- 22 J. Hill, "Ælfric, Gelasisus, and St. George"; Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, 243.
- 23 Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, 236.
- 24 For the audience of the *Blickling Homilies*, see Gatch, "The Unknowable Audience."
- 25 For a discussion of how the *Transitus* narrative influenced the Assumption of the Virgin in the *Benedictional of St. Æthelwold*, see Deshman, *Benedictional*, 128–32.
- 26 Clayton points out that, in rejecting the apocrypha, he is following his sources, and "Ælfric appears to have been in some doubt about what precisely was wrong with these texts" (*Cult of the Virgin*, 262).
- 27 *CH III*.249: "lest the apocryphal book concerning the assumption of the virgin should come into your hands, and you receive what is doubtful as certain."
- 28 Gretsche, *The Intellectual Foundations*; Hofstetter, "Vocabulary," and *Winchester und der späلتaltenglische Sprachgebrauch*. For the argument that the standardization came from Ælfric himself, not from Winchester, see Godden, "Ælfric as Grammarian."
- 29 Napier, *Old English Glosses*, 53, and Gwara, *Aldhelmi Malmesbiriensis prosa de uirginitate*, 292. The gloss presents problems of translation because "scriptorum" could be the genitive plural of either the third declension masculine noun *scriptor* [writer] or the second declension neuter noun *scriptum* [a written document]. The Old English gloss *wipersacana* [apostate] decidedly refers to people, not texts, and therefore might lead a translator to prefer to render the lines as "of lying writers, of apostates," so that the Old English word exists as a simple double for the Latin gloss. This translation, however, makes the gloss disagree with the lemma *apocrifarum*, which are certainly texts, not people. Of the Aldhelm glosses tabulated by Scott Gwara, only two have the Old English gloss. A further three have *falsorum scriptorum* without *wipersacana*, and four others have *falsarum scripturarum* without an Old English gloss. The last of these choices avoids the ambiguity of *scriptorum* by replacing it with the first-declension feminine *scriptura*, which refers unquestionably to writings. I suggest that a bilingual writer, such as Ælfric, when faced with the ambiguity of *scriptorum*, which could refer either to texts or to people, would have realized from the lemma and from context that the word would be better rendered as writings and then might code

switch to read the Old English word *wīþersacana* as a continuation of the thought in English, not as an exact replication of the Latin gloss.

- 30 The word *wīðersaca* is interesting in context of the final miracle in this homily, which explains the death of Julian the apostate, who is described with the same word.
- 31 *CH I.30.4–16*, 429.
- 32 Godden points out that this section contains information available in the first few paragraphs of this letter (*CH III.249*).
- 33 For Ælfric's use of the Cotton-Corpus legendary, see Zettel, "Saints' Lives in Old English"; Jackson and Lapidge, "The Contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary."
- 34 For a discussion of Ælfric's creation of epitomes, see Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Life of St. Æthelwold*, cl–cliii. For Ælfric's use of this method in his redrafting of the *Regularis Concordia*, see Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, 18–60, and "*Meatim Sed et Rustica*."
- 35 *CH III.248–9*. Notably, there was room for poetic artistry in this fairly rigorous method, as can be seen in Corona's comparison between Ælfric's Assumption Homily and his later *Life of Basil* from *Lives of Saints*. Although individual lines can be called very close to the source, the *Lives of Saints* version is in his characteristic rhythmical style (Corona, *Ælfric's Life of St. Basil*, 68–72).
- 36 Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 117: "We say also before [undertaking this translation] that the book has a very deep spiritual meaning, but we write no more than the naked narrative. Then it seems to the uneducated that all the meaning is contained in the univalent narrative, but it is very far from that."
- 37 *CH I.30.65–78*, 431: "There is not written on any book a clear understanding of her ending, except that now today she gloriously departed from the body. Her tomb is clear to all onlookers up to this present day in the middle of the valley of Josaphat: the valley between Mt. Zion and Mt. Olivet. The tomb is shown to be open and empty, and a great church was constructed there for her glory with wonderful stoneworks. It is not known to any mortal man how or at what time her body was taken from there, where it was carried, nor whether she rose from the dead. Many teachers say that her son, who mightily rose on the third day from death, also raised his mother's body from death and placed her in the heavenly kingdom with immortal glory. Also similarly very many teachers have written in their books that resurrected men whom Christ raised from the dead are eternally resurrected."
- 38 *CH III.250–1*. For translation, see previous note. The two texts are so close that the differences between them become insignificant when translated into modern English.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 251.
- 40 The homily on the Assumption of John appears in *CH I.4*.
- 41 Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, 237.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 233.

- 43 CH I.13.
- 44 Ibid., 2.
- 45 Ibid., 86–92, 193: “Mary gave birth to her first-born son on this present day ... The child was not called her first-born, because she bore other children later, but because Christ is the first-born of many spiritual brothers. All Christian men are his spiritual brothers. And he is first-born in grace and divinity, born from the heavenly father.”
- 46 CH I.2.198–9, 196: “Ða hyrdas gesawon ȝ oncneowan. be þam cilde. swa swa hi gesæd wæs” [The shepherds saw and knew by the child, just as it was told to them].
- 47 For a thorough discussion of queenship in Anglo-Saxon literature, see Klein, *Ruling Women*.
- 48 For a discussion of Ælfric’s use of this source, see Corona, *Ælfric’s Life of St. Basil*, 51–73.
- 49 Godden, “Ælfric’s Saints’ Lives.”
- 50 Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin*, 240. For the later English development of the miracles of the virgin, see Southern, “The English Origins of the ‘Miracles of the Virgin.’”
- 51 CH I.30.231–7, 437: “Then on the third night of his fast, the bishop saw a great heavenly host on both sides of the temple and in the middle of the host sat Mary, the heavenly queen. She said to those standing nearby, ‘Summon to me the martyr Mercurius so that he may go to the wicked apostate Julian and kill the one who with arrogant pride renounced God, my son.’”
- 52 Deshman, “*Christus rex et magi reges*”; the specific reference to Edgar’s role is articulated at 397.
- 53 Deshman, “*Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus*.”
- 54 For a discussion of how gender affects the monasticization of rulers for Queen Ælfthryth and her role as an intercessor, see Stafford, “Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen.”
- 55 Clayton, “Centralism and Uniformity,” 102–3.
- 56 CH III.255.
- 57 CH I.30.241, 437.
- 58 CH III.255.
- 59 Ibid., 256.
- 60 The generally accepted dating for the First Series of *Catholic Homilies* is 991, as articulated by Peter Clemoes in “The Chronology of Ælfric’s Works”; Malcolm Godden, however, suggests that it should be dated to 994. For a full review of the evidence, see CH III.xxxii–vi.
- 61 During Æthelwold’s tenure as abbot of Abingdon, he served as Edgar’s tutor in the days of King Eadwig; see John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 159–60.
- 62 Jones, *Ælfric’s Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, 44.
- 63 Problems of dating this document are discussed in *ibid.*, 5–12.
- 64 Ibid., 46.
- 65 For a similarly political reading of another homily, see Robert Upchurch’s

recent argument that Ælfric's revisions to his homily for the second Sunday after Easter criticized the political leaders ("A Big Dog Barks").

66 Ælfric calls the city Cappadocia, but this is the name of the region, not the city (see *CH III.254*).

67 *CH I.30.200–4*, 436: "and Julian learned in one school together. Then it happened that Basil was chosen as bishop for the city that is called Cappadocia, and Julian was chosen as caesar, although he earlier was tonsured as a priest."

68 *CH III.254*.

69 *Ibid.*

70 This is not the only consecration of a priest that Ælfric described by opposing two young men, one who would later be elevated to bishop and the other whom he describes as an apostate. In Ælfric's *Life of St. Æthelwold*, Bishop Ælfheah ordained the great reformers Dunstan, Æthelwold, and "quendam, Æthelstanum uocabulo, qui postmodum monachilem habitum deserens apostata fine tenus perduravit" [a certain Æthelstan by name, who afterwards forsaking the monastic life endured to the end as an apostate] (see Lapidge and Winterbottom, *Life of St. Æthelwold*, 72). Although this story is adapted from Wulfstan of Winchester's version (fl. 996), it probably postdates the *Catholic Homilies* by a few years, Ælfric may have known of the story through his personal connection to Æthelwold.

71 Deshman, "*Benedictus Monarcha et Monachus*," 207–11.

72 *Ibid.*, 238.

I am grateful to Glenn Davis, Rebecca Stephenson, and Paul E. Szarmach for their comments on a draft of this chapter and to Corinna Prior for her assistance with the production of this piece.

- 1 My title plays on that of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.
- 2 Euphrosyne's *uita* is *BHL*, 2723; I cite the Latin *Life of Euphrosyne* by column number from *Vitae patrum* in PL, 73, cols 643–52. Throughout the chapter, all translations are my own.
- 3 See Biggs et al., *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, 201–2.
- 4 The principal surviving manuscript of Ælfric, *Lives of Saints* is London, BL, Cotton Julius E.vii, edited by Walter W. Skeat (cited as *LS*); the Old English *Life of Euphrosyne* is item 33. Of the four anonymous texts in this manuscript (the others are lives of Eustace, Mary of Egypt, and the Seven Sleepers), the *Life of Euphrosyne* is the only one that does not appear in Ælfric's source, as represented by the Cotton-Corpus Legendary; see Jackson and Lapidge, "The Contents of the Cotton-Corpus Legendary." A second version of the Old English *uita*, titled "De sancto [Euf]rosina seo is gehaten smaragdus," appeared in London, BL, Cotton Otho B.x, now fragmentary due to fire. Neil R. Ker notes that its "wording varies a good deal from that of [Skeat's] printed text" (*Catalogue*, 226); see also *ibid.*, 177.
- 5 An important general study, which views female cross-dressing as a means to gain status, is Bullough, "Transvestites in the Middle Ages." John Anson traces the development of a tradition through the lives of Euphrosyne, Eugenia, and other cross-dressing saints ("The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism"). Hippolyte Delehaye refers to the *Life of Euphrosyne* as a "pious novelette" (*The Legends of the Saints*, 51). Sandra Lowerre provides a useful bibliography in "To Rise beyond Their Sex."
- 6 Both transvestite saints' lives appear in Cotton Julius E.vii; the *passio* of Eugenia is the second item in *LS*. In Cotton Otho B.x, "Passio sanctae Eugeniae uirginis" immediately precedes the *uita* of Euphrosyne (Ker, *Catalogue*, 225).
- 7 For example, Paul E. Szarmach "conceived" his study of Saint Euphrosyne "as a twin" to his work on Saint Eugenia; see "St. Euphrosyne: Holy Transvestite," 362, n. 1. The twin essay is "Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia." After examining Eugenia, Allen Frantzen finds that "similar conditions obtain in the life of Euphrosyne" ("When Women Aren't Enough," 463). More recently, Anke Bernau has offered a reading of the two texts together ("The Translation of Purity in the Old English *Lives* of St Eugenia and St Euphrosyne").
- 8 P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 71.
- 9 For the purposes of this essay, I use the terms *martyr* to refer to a saint who is the subject of a *passio* and *confessor* to refer to a saint who is the subject of a *uita*. Historically, the first saints were martyrs. In the second century, the church began to honour those who did not die, but "nonetheless suffered torture, imprisonment, or exile for [Christ]; they were called confessors. This

broadening of the concept of ‘martyr’ marked the first step in the extension of the cult of saints” (Day, “Confessor,” 82–3). Then, as the period of persecution came to a close, the definition of *confessor* expanded to include “men and women whose sanctity was manifested not by martyrdom but by lives of great piety and service to God, usually, though not necessarily, within the church” (Hurt, *Ælfric*, 74). Modern readers readily accept that the subject of a passion is called a martyr, whether male or female. Likewise, from this historical perspective, the subject of a *uita* may be labelled a confessor, whether male or female. Although “female confessor” often meets with resistance, while “female martyr” does not, the concepts “female martyr” and “female confessor” are, in fact, equally (in)valid. I use “female confessor” provisionally until further work can be done on these problematic binaries and how to reconcile them with the Anglo-Saxon view of female saints as neither martyrs nor confessors but virgins.

10 Lapidge, “The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England,” 252.

11 Ibid., 253.

12 Ibid.

13 Cuthbert consoles his friend Herebert by praying that their deaths will take place simultaneously; see Bede’s “Life of Cuthbert” in Colgrave, *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert*, especially chap. 28, and Ælfric’s *Depositio sancti Cuthberhti*, CH II 10. Guthlac’s relationship with his mourning follower Beccel dominates *Guthlac B*; see Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*. Ælfric describes the community’s outpouring of grief at Martin’s death, starting with his announcement thereof, in lines 1306–84; the *Vita Martini* is item 31 in *LS*.

14 Scheil, “Somatic Ambiguity,” 346.

15 Zosimus begins to weep in line 235 and he does not stop until line 941. The Life of Mary of Egypt is item 23B in *LS*, but I cite Magennis, *The Old English Life of Saint Mary of Egypt*. “Be Sancta Marian Egyptiace” is item 12 in Cotton Otho B.x (Ker, *Catalogue*, 177). Interestingly, Mary of Egypt and Euphrosyne travel together in the Old French tradition as well. Simon Gaunt notes that both *Euphrosine* and *Marie l’Egyptienne* appear in Oxford, Bodleian, Canon. Misc. 74, “an important hagiographic anthology” (“Straight Minds / ‘Queer’ Wishes,” 163). I have read Mary of Egypt as a confessor-figure in “*Vitas Matrum*: Mary of Egypt as Female Confessor.”

16 Euphrosyne’s female nature fares somewhat better in the most recent study of the anonymous saint’s life, published after this chapter was written. David Clark analyzes the *uita* in the last chapter of *Between Medieval Men* (195–203). For Clark, transvestite saints’ lives feature “depictions of women who are both women and not women, men and not men” (202); for example, the audience remains “aware that this both is and is not a man – it is a man on the level of clothing, behaviour, and spiritual/social status, but it is nevertheless a biological woman” (199). Yet he also acknowledges that, in light of the saint’s death, “the fluid gender dynamic is undermined by the implication that Smaragdus has, after all, all along always been the woman Euphrosyne” (201).

17 Szarmach, “St. Euphrosyne,” 353.

- 18 John Boswell mentions this scene, but he confuses the names Eufrosia with Euphrosyne and Agapitus with Smaragdus. His point, however, stands: “Although it is in fact a woman to whom the monks are drawn, the account evinces no surprise on anyone’s part that the monks should experience intense sexual attraction toward a person ostensibly of their own gender” (“Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories,” 28). R.D. Fulk reads this scene as an example of Foucault’s pre-modern acts-based sexuality (“Male Homoeroticism,” 1–4). Foucault’s seminal argument appears in *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1.
- 19 LS 33.159–63, 344: “Then, because the same Smaragdus was fair of face, as often as the brothers came to church, then the fiendish spirit sent many thoughts into their minds and they became very tempted by his fairness.”
- 20 Szarmach, “St. Euphrosyne,” 358.
- 21 Frantzen, “When Women Aren’t Enough,” 466.
- 22 Gaunt, “Straight Minds / ‘Queer’ Wishes,” 166.
- 23 647: “because Smaragdus had an attractive face, when s/he came into the church to pray to God, the devil incited many against the beauty of that/his/her face through evil thoughts.”
- 24 Ibid., “such beauty.”
- 25 LS 33.164, 344: “such a beautiful person.”
- 26 Scheil, “Somatic Ambiguity,” 345.
- 27 Szarmach, “St. Euphrosyne,” 360.
- 28 Frantzen, “When Women Aren’t Enough,” 461.
- 29 Lees and Overing, “Before History, Before Difference,” 328.
- 30 Ibid., 329.
- 31 Ibid., 330.
- 32 Frantzen, “When Women Aren’t Enough,” 463. John Anson explains that the narrative of a transvestite martyr’s passion appears “to break in the middle, so that when the disguise plot has reached its resolution, the stories recommence with a seemingly unrelated sequence concerning the persecution and eventual martyrdom of the saints” (“The Female Transvestite,” 20). In texts like the *Passion of Eugenia*, when Melantia is introduced in the role of female seducer, “it is as if [the saint] undoes the guilt of her whole sex by becoming the victim of its designs against men” (19). Thus, the martyr’s “acknowledged hatred of the flesh begins to resemble increasingly the hatred and fear of women encountered in previous legends,” like that of Euphrosyne (27).
- 33 The *Life of Æthelthryth* is LS 20.
- 34 Jackson analyzes Ælfric’s concluding exhortation to marital chastity in “Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage.”
- 35 Szarmach, “St. Euphrosyne,” 355.
- 36 Scheil, “Somatic Ambiguity,” 357.
- 37 Magennis, “Contrasting Features,” 324.
- 38 Paphnuntius’s laments occur at lines 193–201, 265–74, and 306–10.

- 39 In contrast, Euphrosyne is called “þæt mæden” only twice: when Paphnuntius begins her education at the age of twelve (*LS* 33.26, 336) and to clarify the identity of a speaker in dialogue (*LS* 33.118, 332); both instances translate the Latin *puella*.
- 40 643: “she was greatly afflicted by sorrows, seeing her husband weeping excessively.”
- 41 643: “fruit of the womb.”
- 42 *LS* 33.17–18, 336: “the fruit of a child.”
- 43 *LS* 33.39, 336: “the fruit of your prayers, my daughter.”
- 44 645: “had a wife who bore me, who has now passed on from this life.”
- 45 *LS* 33.103, 340: “his mate my mother is departed from this life.”
- 46 *LS* 33.5, 334: “deeply troubled.”
- 47 *LS* 33.6–7, 334: “that after his death would take up his possessions.”
- 48 *LS* 33.178, 346: “very sad.”
- 49 *LS* 33.184, 346: “very upset.”
- 50 *LS* 33.191–2, 346: “they wept for her as if she were dead; the father-in-law bemoaned his daughter-in-law, and the bridegroom his bride.”
- 51 *LS* 33.193–201, 346: “Woe is me, my sweetest child. Woe is me, the light of my eyes and my life’s consolation. Who has deprived me of my prosperity or scattered my possessions? Who cut down my vineyard or extinguished my lantern? Who deprived me of my hope or profaned the beauty of my daughter? Which wolf has seized my lamb, or which place on sea or land has hidden so royal a countenance? She was the consolation of the mourning and the rest of the afflicted. Oh, you earth, never swallow my blood before I see what has been done to Euphrosyne, my daughter.”
- 52 Magennis, “Contrasting Features,” 344.
- 53 *LS* 33.202–4, 346: “they all began to weep, and a great wailing was throughout all the city. Then Paphnuntius might not have any patience, nor receive any consolation.”
- 54 *LS* 33.208, 348: “very unhappy.”
- 55 *LS* 33.206, 346: “that I might find the product of your prayer.”
- 56 *LS* 33.212–13, 348: “ne ... swa him gewunelic wæs þonne hi hwæs bædon” [not as was usual for them when they prayed for something].
- 57 *LS* 33.213–15, 348: “Truly, the blessed woman Euphrosyne’s prayer to God by day and night was that she would never in her life be revealed.” The Old English translator adds the epithet “blessed woman”; the Latin refers to her by name only (648).
- 58 *LS* 33.221, 348: “counsel.”
- 59 *LS* 33.129, 342: “for my bridegroom’s sake.”
- 60 *LS* 33.188, 346: “in a convent of women.”
- 61 See *LS* 33.79, 340.
- 62 *LS* 33.117–18, 342: “your father’s property will find inheritors enough.”
- 63 *LS* 33.154–5, 344: “if I remain here, the rest [of my many possessions] will come here.”

- 64 For an analysis of these economic exchanges, see Stallcup, “The Old English *Life of Saint Euphrosyne*.”
- 65 LS 33.224–5, 348: “I trust in God that He yet in this life will reveal her.”
- 66 LS 33.228–9, 348: “Pray for me, for my suffering over my daughter grows more and more for me with sorrow.”
- 67 PL 73, 648: “Pray for me, father, because I am not able to endure the pain over my daughter, but more and more from day to day it is renewed and my wound grows, and my soul is troubled.”
- 68 PL 73, 648: “excessively upset.”
- 69 LS 33.247–8, 350: “Now leave off your great suffering.”
- 70 PL 73, 649: “Leave off, now, leave off; why do you kill yourself by being sad? But give thanks to God, despairing of nothing.”
- 71 Magennis, “Contrasting Features,” 344.
- 72 LS 33.234, 348: “then she was all suffused with tears.”
- 73 See LS 33.237, 348.
- 74 PL 73, 649: “Indeed, seeing her father in grievous sorrow, she felt pity for him. But fearing lest she be recognized, and that he would cause problems [lit., create an obstacle] for her, but wishing that he would be consoled, she spoke to him.”
- 75 PL 73, 649: “Moreover so that she would not be recognized through copious talking.”
- 76 LS 33.251–2, 350: “that [God] grant you patience and endurance and give you what is best for you and necessary for her.”
- 77 LS 33.257–8, 350: “my mind is strengthened by this brother, and I am as cheerful as if I had found my daughter.”
- 78 LS 33.260–2, 350: “then Smaragdus fulfilled thirty-eight years in this unknown [brutish?] state, and fell into illness, and also died of it.”
- 79 PL 73, 649: “And when Paphnuntius wished to leave, her spirit was compassionating with him, her face was pale, and filled with tears. Moreover, because of the excessive fasting and long abstinence, she was vomiting blood.”
- 80 In the Latin text, PL 73, 649: “coepit eum osculari lacrymans” [he began to kiss him, crying], as he begins to speak this lament.
- 81 LS 33.265–74, 350–2: “Woe is me! Where now are your promises which you gave me, that I might see my daughter yet? Indeed! Now we had some consolation through you and you will forsake us? Woe is me. Who shall comfort my old age? To whom shall I go who will support me? My sorrow is double. Now it is thirty-eight years that my daughter has been lost to me, and no explanation has come to me, though I eagerly yearned for it. Intolerable sorrow holds me. In whom may I henceforth hope? Or what consolation may I receive? Mourning to this extent I will descend into hell.”
- 82 PL 73, 650: “Behold – not only will I not see her, but you, in whom I had tolerable consolation, will forsake us.”
- 83 LS 33.284–5, 352: “Then Smaragdus, he who was before called Euphrosyne, perceived that the day of her departure had arrived.” Cf. the Latin source at

PL 73, 650: “Smaragdus, qui et Euphrosyna” (“Smaragdus, who [is] also Euphrosyne”).

- 84 LS 33.286–98, 352: “God almighty has directed my miserable life well and fulfilled my desire that I might end the course of my life manfully. It was not through my might but through His help which protected me from the fiend’s snares ... Do not be worried about your daughter Euphrosyne any longer; truly, I – miserable one – am she herself, and you are Paphnuntius my father. Even now you have seen me, and your desire is fulfilled, but do not let anyone know this, nor permit any man to wash and prepare my body except you. Also likewise I told the abbot that I had great wealth and I promised him that I would donate it here if I remained here. Now you perform what I promised because this place is worthy, and pray for me.” At the conclusion of her speech, the Latin author makes it clear that the saint’s *dies natalis* is *Kalendis Ianuarii* (650), but this fact is omitted from the Old English text, perhaps because the scribe recording the *uita* realized that it was being inserted into the manuscript out of its proper place. Euphrosyne’s feast day is 11 February, but in the Julius E.vii collection, her *uita* appears between Saints Edmund and Cecilia (20 and 22 November, respectively).
- 85 LS 33.154, 344, and LS 33.297, 352: “her þurhwun[ian]” [to remain here].
- 86 See LS 33.78, 340.
- 87 LS 33.302, 352: “sam-cwicne”; see LS 33.300–1, 352: “he on eorðan feoll . swylce he dead wære.”
- 88 LS 33.306–10, 352–4: “Woe is me, my sweetest child. Why would you not reveal yourself to me so that I might have lived here with you of my own free will? Woe is me that you hid yourself so long. How have you endured the snares of the old fiend? And now you enter into eternal life.”
- 89 See LS 33.193, 346.
- 90 LS 33.272, 350: “unaræfnedlic sar”; LS 33.309, 354: “aræfnodest.”
- 91 LS 33.312–13, 354: “ufan þone halgan lichoman feoll.”
- 92 LS 33.313–17, 354: “Euphrosyne, bride of Christ and child of holy parents, do not be forgetful of your fellow servants and of this minster, but pray to the Lord for us, that He may make us come manfully to the harbor of salvation, and make us partakers with Him and His saints.”
- 93 See LS 33.131, 342. The Latin equivalent is *uiriliter* (see PL 73, 650 and 651).
- 94 LS 33.319, 354: “that she was a female person.” Scheil translates as “a man of the female sex” (“Somatic Ambiguity,” 356).
- 95 LS 33.320, 354: “He who works such wonders in a womanly and weak nature.”
- 96 LS 33.166–7, 344: “heora tyddernyssum.”
- 97 LS 33.322, 354: “that holy body.”
- 98 The day (singular) of their (plural) departure is celebrated in the monastery; see LS 33.330, 354: “se dæg heora forðfore.”

- 1 Magennis, *The Old English Life of Saint Mary of Egypt*. The edition comes with parallel-text translation and an introduction offering a most useful bibliography. See also Magennis, “Maria Aegyptica.”
- 2 Scragg, *The Old English Life of Mary of Egypt*. The contributions are Tkacz, “Byzantine Theology in the Old English *De Transitu Mariae Aegypticae*”; Orchard, “Rhetoric and Style”; Lees, “Vision and Place”; Norris, “Vitas Matrum.” One must also cite here Chase, “Source Study as a Trick.”
- 3 Poppe and Ross, *The Legend of Mary of Egypt*. Contributions relevant to the present study are Stevenson, “The Holy Sinner” and “Vita Sanctae Mariae Egipticae”; Magennis, “St. Mary of Egypt and Ælfric,” 112. See also Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, especially 26–56, where Mary of Egypt is treated along with four other repentants. Kouli translates from the Greek, with introduction, “Life of St. Mary of Egypt.” Pepin and Feiss translate *Saint Mary of Egypt*, giving treatments by Flodoard of Reims, Hildebert of Lavardin, and an anonymous Spanish poet.
- 4 Cantara, “St. Mary of Egypt” (thesis). See also now Cantara, “Saint Mary of Egypt” in Norris, *Anonymous Interpolations*. Cantara observes that the Otho text comprises “approximately one-third” of the Julius version. Her article summarizes the major results from her thesis.
- 5 Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. See also Jauss and Bahti, “The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature.”
- 6 Scheil, “Bodies and Boundaries,” 137–56. Here and there Scheil points out the importance of expectations, particularly regarding theme or character.
- 7 See the essays by Rhonda McDaniel, Renée Trilling, and Rosalind Love cited below. For further observations on genre see T. Hill, “*Imago Dei*”; Godden, “Experiments in Genre.”
- 8 Horner, “‘Why Do You Speak So Much Foolishness?’” Jonathan Wilcox considers humour, especially in the Lives of Lucy, Cecilia, and Agatha, where the humour is at the expense of pagan torturers and abusers (see *Humor in Anglo-Saxon Literature*). Hugh Magennis, in the same collection, seeks to establish a theoretical base for humour in incongruity (“A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Heaven”). Magennis, quite appropriately sees no humour in several details of the Life of Mary of Egypt (ibid., 143–4), though a current audience might find the extremes of fasting a strain on the imagination. He does grant that there is comic potential in the original story, as in the mutual prostration of Mary and Zosimus, but that the Old English writer seems to level out the possibilities of the original here.
- 9 Robinson, “Old English Literature in Its Most Immediate Context.” The article now appears in Robinson, *The Editing of Old English*. Other articles taking inspiration from Robinson are Liuzza, “The Texts of the Old English Riddle 30,” and “The Old English Christ and Guthlac”; Keefer, “Respecting the Book”; Szarmach, “Æðelflæd of Mercia.”
- 10 LS 23B. The manuscript witnesses are London, BL, Cotton Julius E.vii, art. 31 (Ker, *Catalogue*, 162; Gneuss, *Handlist*, 339), beg. xi, by way of Bury St Edmunds; London, BL, Cotton Otho B.x, art. 12. (Ker, *Catalogue*, 177;

Gneuss, *Handlist*, 355), xi; Gloucester, Cathedral 35, art. 2 (Ker, *Catalogue*, 117; Gneuss, *Handlist*, 262); xi¹–xi² fragmentary. Cantara's results from the burnt Otho B.x are not to be dismissed, for the contrasts they offer to Julius E.vii are significant, certainly as a chapter in the history of Old English scribes. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to pursue this comparison.

11 Ker, *Catalogue*, 210.

12 Ibid., 206.

13 Ker, *Catalogue*, 257; Gneuss, *Handlist*, 472. See the facsimile edition: Eliason and Clemoes, *Ælfric's First Series of Catholic Homilies*.

14 LS 31, following line 1495, page 312.

15 Clemoes, "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works."

16 Woolf, "Saints' Lives," 61.

17 See Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 119–21, 131–2.

18 A. Campbell, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*.

19 Jackson, "Vitae Patrum," 162.

20 The story of Eugenia is a tough match to the apparent audience, especially if at the outset Ælfric says he will avoid the *subtilia* of the *Vitas patrum*. What would – or could – Æthelweard and Æthelmær learn from the story of a young woman who, with two male schoolmates and servants "who happen to be eunuchs" and thus "loyal" to her, runs off to a monastery? For the background to this Life see Whatley, "Eugenia before Ælfric."

21 Hugh Magennis concludes his comparison with the wry observation that "someone as interested in Ælfric as the compiler of Cotton Julius E.vii evidently was, appears to have been unconcerned at the dilution of Ælfric's message which the quite calculated addition of the *Life of St. Mary of Egypt* to *Lives of Saints* involved" ("St. Mary of Egypt and Ælfric," 112).

22 Karras, "Holy Harlots," 3–32, with special reference to "the Prostitute Saints of Late Antiquity," 6–17.

23 Stevenson, "The Holy Sinner," 49.

24 LS 23B.51–5, 4.

25 Stevenson, "The Holy Sinner," 26–7.

26 Brown, *The Body and Society*, 242, as noted in *ibid.*, 37.

27 See Alcuin, *Liber de virtutibus et vitiis*, 635, cap. xxxii, where *accidia* is the sixth cardinal sin. Alcuin's work was rendered into three homilies in the ninth century, which appear in the later Cambridge, Pembroke College 25; the capital sins are part of Homily 93, fols 172r–75r. Vercelli Homily XX is the Old English rendition of this homily. See my "Pembroke College 25, Arts. 93–95," and also Scragg *The Vercelli Homilies*, 329–46. For Ælfric on the eight capital sins see *CH II*.12.477–559, 123–6.

28 See the comprehensive entry by TeSelle, "Pelagius, Pelagianism."

29 Stevenson, "The Holy Sinner," 50.

30 LS 34.173–4, 366.

31 One may observe that it is a feeble motivation for a Christian to follow the urgings of friends.

- 32 Hennecke, “The Acts of Paul,” in *New Testament Apocrypha* (trans. R.M. Wilson). This edition-translation provides useful information on the text and its various complications. See also James, “The Acts of Paul: The Story of Thecla,” in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 272–81. Stevenson suggests a connection between Mary and “the grandmother of all female ascetics, Thecla” (“The Holy Sinner,” 24). Bede knows Thecla, mentioning her in the Hymn to Ætheldreda, *HE* IV.20, citing her for her power over lions. Thecla appears in *OEM*; see Kotzor, *Das altenglischen Martyrologium*, 2: 216–17. Aldhelm honours Thecla in both the prose and poetic *De Virginitate*; see Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera Omnia: Carmen de Virginitate*, lines 1975–2008, 434–6; *Prosa De Virginitate*, 299–300. Translations are Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 146–7; Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 113; both are now reprinted by Brewer, 2009.
- 33 Hennecke, “The Acts of Paul,” s. 8, 355.
- 34 *Ibid.*, s. 25.
- 35 *Ibid.*, s. 26.
- 36 *Ibid.*, s. 40.
- 37 Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows*, 60.
- 38 Mary does reflect on the temptations offered by food, wine, and “lust þæra sceandlicra sceopleoða”[desire for wanton poems] (*LS* 23B.539.36), which she evidently suffers in a kind of recollection of her former days.
- 39 For “scynhyw” Bosworth-Toller give forms of *fantasia* and *fantasma*, and *delsusio mentis*, which inspires my rendering here.
- 40 Note that Skeat offers “creature” for my “wild animal.”
- 41 Roberts, Kay, and Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, 1: 424–5 (07.10, 07.10.01).
- 42 *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, s.v.
- 43 Griffith, *Judith*, 14a and note; Griffith observes that the Vulgate states that Judith’s beauty was enhanced for the occasion.
- 44 Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, 221.
- 45 Text of version T and translation as in *ibid.*, 218.
- 46 Stevenson, “The Holy Sinner,” 35.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 19–40, gives a broad overview of the literary context, particularly the characteristics of theme and character. The phrase “attraction-repulsion” is mine.
- 48 See Magennis, *The Old English Life of Saint Mary of Egypt*, line 921, note; see also Stevenson, “The Holy Sinner,” 24.
- 49 The anonymous *Life of Euphrosyne* (*LS* 33) offers a point of contrast to the burial of Mary. Euphrosyne, living for thirty-eight years disguised as the monk Smaragdus, comforts her uncomprehending father on the “disappearance” of his daughter. Dying, she reveals herself to her father and asks specifically that he keep her identity secret and that “ne ne gēpaf ðu þæt ænig man minne lichaman ðwea and gyrwa butan þe sylf” [neither suffer thou that any man wash and prepare my body, save thyself] (*LS* 33.293–5, 352). Yet her wishes are not followed, it would appear. Once the

monastic community learns of her death, they seek to bury her corpse. At that time they “onfundon þæt heo wæs wifhades man” [they discovered that she was a woman] (*LS* 33.319, 354) and glorified God, who worked such miracles. Exactly what “onfundon” signifies is unclear, as are any particulars of what the community may have seen. The father’s role in the actual burial is unstated. Euphrosyne’s body is now holy, for when a one-eyed brother kisses her body and touches her with miraculous effect, he receives his eye back. The immediate miracle would seem to triumph properly over Euphrosyne’s wishes. See Norris, “Vitas Matrum.”

50 Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 425–8.

51 Ibid., 428. Curtius extends his observation to cover secular narrative poetry, 429–35, suggesting ultimately that the incorporation of humoristic elements in “serious” literature is medieval.

52 The essays appear in Wilcox, *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*: Horner, “‘Why Do You Speak So Much Foolishness?’”; Magennis, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Heaven.” As for laughter per se, Magennis offers “types”: (1) Laughter as a Symbol of Joy or Relief; (2) Laughter of Triumph, Hostility, and Scorn; (3) Laughter as a Symbol of Happiness and Prosperity; (4) Disordered, Riotous Laughter; (5) Sublime Laughter. See also his “Images of Laughter in Old English Poetry,” 193–210.

53 Horner, “Why Do You Speak,” especially 130–6.

54 Magennis, “A Funny Thing,” 152–7. For a most useful edition see Magennis, *The Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers*; see also *LS* 23.

55 I have severely abbreviated this account of the legend. For more discussion see Magennis’s introduction to the edition, especially 1–6.

56 Clemoes, “The Chronology of Ælfric’s Works,” 219, n. 2.

57 Magennis, “A Funny Thing,” 143–4.

58 See Griffith, *Judith*, 136, n. 268B, for a discussion of the key words.

59 Ibid., 136–7, n. 20.

60 Norris, “Vitas Matrum.” Norris includes Euphrosyne in her discussion.

61 Ibid., *passim*.

62 Day, “Confessors” (entry in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* does not include martyrs).

63 Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 61–3.

64 Ibid., 61.

65 Ibid., 62.

I thank the National Endowment for the Humanities, Professor Paul E. Szarmach, and the organizers of the NEH Seminar, “Holy Men and Holy Women in Anglo-Saxon England,” in the summer of 2006 at the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, for the opportunity to work on this project.

- 1 Much of my previous work in hagiography, including longitudinal studies of Saints Cuthbert, Guthlac, and Mary of Egypt, has similarly taken a longer-term, interdisciplinary perspective on the cults of the saints, particularly with respect to constructions of sanctity. Regarding Anglo-Saxon conceptualizations of virginity, see Aldhelm’s prose and verse versions of *De Virginitate*. The standard edition is Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*. Standard translations are Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, and Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*. For a discussion of the generative power of chastity in the classical tradition, see Irwin, “The Invention of Virginity on Olympus.”
- 2 It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge specifically the scholarly body of work by Professor Virginia Blanton on Æthelthryth. In particular, her longitudinal study, *Signs of Devotion*, from its careful scholarly methodology and rich insights to its detailed cataloguing of source materials, contributes profoundly to the study of the saint’s cult.
- 3 In *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture*, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has explored the concept of the flowering virgin in twelfth- and thirteenth-century female saints’ lives. Her discussions of Aldhelm (20–1), distinctions between virginity and chastity (46–7), virginity and metaphorical fertility (60 ff.), and “dotality” (57 ff.) – a concept that seems related to my presentation here of “generativity” – all are germane to my analysis. From an alternative perspective on the same theme, Lees and Overing (in, e.g., “Birthing Bishops”) have pointed out that Bede’s treatment of Hild (as metaphorically maternal) raises troubling questions for a feminist/Marxist understanding of her story, role, and significance. This theoretical platform, which asserts that no agency was assigned to mentoring, teaching, metaphorical nourishing, or other similar work that traditionally and overdeterministically has often been deemed “maternal,” inevitably sees Hild and similar female figures as having been rendered passive and “sterile” by ideologically scripted accounts. See also Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*; Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England*; and Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*.
- 4 The standard edition is Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*.
- 5 According to Colgrave, Bede uses but does not acknowledge Stephanus as a source for Æthelthryth (ibid., xii).
- 6 Ibid., 40–1.
- 7 The standard edition is *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (CCSL)*, 123B. See also the translation by McClure and Collins, *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.
- 8 CCSL, 123B, 528–9.

- 9 McClure and Collins, *Bede*, 335–6.
- 10 At least one commonality among all four is this very concept of steadfastness and long-term fruitfulness. Cuthbert, Egbert, and Geolfrid, through their *longanimitas*, are envisioned as having brought Celtic Iona and Lindisfarne more into line with Roman practice, while Æthelthryth's perseverance produces a faithful Benedictine foundation at Ely. Each leaves a long spiritual legacy and numerous "offspring." Such *longanimitas* is one of the "fruits" of the Holy Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22–3).
- 11 The standard edition is Colgrave and Mynors, *HE*. The essential commentary is Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*.
- 12 *HE* IV.19, 390, 392. In *Signs of Devotion*, Blanton has also argued that emphasis on these themes, in their iteration in Bede, particularly in their recurrence in the account of Æthelthryth (derived from Bede) in the thirteenth-century *South English Legendary*, accentuates the saint's agency in her spiritual life and helps to establish her particular niche. While Blanton's critical history of the cult analyzes many complexities in the "handling" of the saint, the author also notes that "the presentation of Æthelthryth as a nourisher is a compelling image of motherhood" (245) and that "this change [in the presentation of the saint] amplifies Æthelthryth's authority as a maternal figure" (246).
- 13 See also Blanton's perceptive discussion of these lines in *Signs of Devotion*, 57–9.
- 14 The standard edition is Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*.
- 15 I am indebted to Paul E. Szarmach for his comments on the Old English and Latin versions of the *HE* with respect to Æthelthryth in "Æðeldreda in the OE Bede" and for his generosity in sharing the essay with me in advance of its publication.
- 16 The standard edition is Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*. See also the edition and translation by Herzfeld, *An Old English Martyrology*. On the *OEM*, see also the chapters by Christine Rauer and Jacqueline Stodnick in this collection.
- 17 Kotzor, *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, 127–9. Herzfeld's translation reads, "On the twenty-third day of the month is the departure of the holy queen St Etheldreda. She had been given in marriage to two men, and yet she was a pure woman. First she was married to Tondberht, alderman of the South Gyrwians, and afterwards she became the wife of Ecgferð, King of Northumberland, because she was daughter of Anna, King of East Anglia. She was twelve years with King Ecgferð, and by no means could he make her change her mind. Then she took the veil in the monastery called Coldingham. A year after this she built a nunnery in the place that we call Ely; there she was abbess, and henceforward she used to wear woollen garments, and she rarely bathed in a hot bath, except before Easter and before Pentecost and the day of Christ's baptism; rarely she went to meals oftener than once a day, and from the time of the vigils she always remained

in church praying until day-time, and by divine inspiration she foretold herself when she was going to depart from this world, and then she really departed. She had been buried in the earth sixteen years, and when they afterwards took up the body it was found so uncorrupted, as if she had died on the same day. A large wound was open on her neck, when she was put into the grave, and as she was taken up again from the grave, it had healed, so that nothing but the mark was there" (*An Old English Martyrology*, 103).

- 18 The standard edition is Blake, *Liber Eliensis*. See also the translation by Janet Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely*. Rosalind Love addresses other aspects of this episode, referring to it by its incipit ("Transactis haut eminus"), in *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*; see especially lix–lxxi.
- 19 Monika Otter studies the symbolic relations of saint and shrine in "The Temptation of St Æthelthryth." Otter sees in this episode "cultural anxieties ... about the presence of a female body in male surroundings" (141), particularly in post-Conquest Ely.
- 20 Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, 61.
- 21 Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History*, 82.
- 22 Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, 61.
- 23 Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History*, 82.
- 24 Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, 61.
- 25 Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis: A History*, 82.
- 26 The standard edition is Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints (LS)*.
- 27 Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, 54.
- 28 Of special interest are the Ælfrician additions in *LS* 20.3–4; 11–12; 15–20, 432; 107–12, 438; and 120–35, 440.
- 29 *LS* 20.1–4, 432–3.
- 30 *LS* 20.15–19, 432–3.
- 31 *LS* 20.107–12, 438–9.
- 32 *LS* 20.37–40, 434–5.
- 33 *LS* 20.120–35, 440. Skeat's translation is as follows: "In like manner have laymen also, as books tell us, / preserved often their chastity in the marriage-state, for the love of Christ, / as we might relate if ye cared to hear it. / However, we will tell you of a certain thane, / who lived thirty years with his wife in continence; / he begat three sons, and thenceforward they both lived / for thirty years without cohabitation, / giving much alms, until the husband / entered the monastic life, and God's angels / came just at his death, and carried his soul / with song to heaven, as the books tell us. / Many examples of such are there in books, / how oftentimes men and their wives have lived wondrously, / and dwelt in chastity, to the glory of Jesus, / who consecrated virginity, even Christ our Saviour; / to whom be honour and glory for ever. Amen" (*LS* 20.120–35, 441).
- 34 See also Robert Upchurch's work on Ælfrician concepts of marriage and virginity, including his book *Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses*. Upchurch's discussion of the treatment of steadfastness and celibacy in Ælfric's homilies, particularly in *Memory of the Saints*, is especially instructive, as are his

observations about presentation of these themes to lay audiences (19–26). Similarly, Peter Jackson, in “Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage,” focuses on the issue of celibacy and marriage, arguing that Ælfric, being troubled by Æthelthryth’s “unilateral” virginity, provided the exemplum as a corrective to the saint’s stance. While this is certainly not implausible, the particulars of text and context for Ælfric’s account perhaps provide more direct clues about the Abbot’s motivations. Given the specified patrons for *Lives of Saints* (i.e., Æthelweard and Æthelmær), it would seem that an exemplum about a ðegn (and focusing more on the ðegn than on his wife) might serve less to indict Æthelthryth than to “translate” the import of Æthelthryth’s steadfastness as an example for the broader audience – male as well as female, lay as well as clerical – represented by the patrons. As a point of comparison, *The Benedictional of St Æthelwold*’s unreserved celebration of the saint seems to evince none of the unease Jackson ascribes to Ælfric.

- 35 London, BL Additional 49598, fols 2r, 90v. The standard critical study is Deshman, *The Benedictional of St Æthelwold*. See also Prescott, *The Benedictional of St Æthelwold* and Gretsche, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*.
- 36 See Deshman, *The Benedictional of St Æthelwold*, 4, 170 ff., 252.
- 37 This seems significant in itself, as no other saint appears twice; however, some images have been lost.
- 38 It is worth noting here, for example, if only in passing, two relevant points about the miniature on folio 2r: (1) as the Choir of Virgins includes Mary Magdalen, the concept of “virginity” at work here is clearly not the conventional one of sexual purity, but is perhaps one of steadfastness; (2) the Choir’s singing of praises here is reminiscent of the singing by the choir of virgins at end of Bede’s *Hymn*.
- 39 For fine-quality reproductions of the miniatures, see Keynes, *Anglo-Saxon Index at Trinity College, Cambridge*. Regarding Æthelthryth and *The Benedictional of St Æthelwold*, see also thought-provoking discussions by Horner, *The Discourse of Enclosure* (esp. 2–6 on integrity and enclosure); and by Karkov, “The Body of St Æthelthryth,” on fetishism and scopophilia with respect to the cult.
- 40 Compare the multivalence of similar allusions linking Æthelthryth and Mary in Bede’s *Hymn*.
- 41 See also Deshman, *The Benedictional of St Æthelwold*, 79–80.
- 42 Ibid., 173.

- 1 Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, 4–5. All quotations and translations are from this edition. The lections are preserved in London, BL, Cotton Caligula A. viii, fols. 93v–95v and CCCC 393, fols. 69r–71v.
- 2 Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, 217–24. Hollis provides an overview of Goscelin’s travels, including his arrival from the Abbey of Saint-Bertin to work under the Bishop of Sherborne; after the bishop’s death in 1078, his visits to several East Anglian houses (“Burh,” Barking, Ely, and Ramsey); and his permanent position at Canterbury, c. 1090. For a more extended discussion, see Lapidge and Love, “The Latin Hagiography of England and Wales,” 225–33. Also, see Rosalind Love’s chapter on Goscelin’s presentation of female saints in the present volume, “Torture me, rend me, burn me, kill me!”
- 3 The *Liber Eliensis* records that Goscelin composed a life of Æthelthryth and, since he wrote liturgy for the other Ely women, it seems likely he also wrote lections for her feast as well. See Love’s discussion of these texts, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, xiii–cxxviii, where she indicates that Goscelin is the likely author of the two lections.
- 4 Bede, *HE* IV.19, 390–401. Translations will be from this edition unless otherwise noted.
- 5 Bede, *HE* III.8, 236–41. Sæthryth appears to be a stepdaughter of King Anna, according to Bede, who describes her as “filia uxoris Annae” versus Æthelburh, who is “filia naturalis.”
- 6 On the fabrication of these women, see the discussion by Fell, “Saint Æðelþryð,” 18–34. For an extension of Fell’s argument, which illustrates how the cults were promoted to enhance Ely’s reputation as a place of sanctity, see my article “King Anna’s Daughters” and also a companion piece, “Presenting the Sister Saints of Ely.” <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2008.00561.x/abstract> (accessed November 2012).
- 7 Pauline Stafford notes that an unusual mass in Seaxburh’s honour appears in The New Minster Missal, where Seaxburh is identified as a virgin, not a mother. See her *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 180.
- 8 Ibid., 162–92. See also Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*.
- 9 On Wihtburh, see my article “King Anna’s Daughters.” On Æthelthryth, see these representative discussions: Black, “Nutrix Pia: The Flowering of the Cult of St. Æthelthryth,” in this volume; my *Signs of Devotion*; Griffiths, “Reading Ælfric’s Saint Æthelthryth”; Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 46–74; Jackson, “Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage”; Karkov, “The Body of St Æthelthryth”; Otter, “The Temptation of St. Aethelthryth”; Ridyard, *The Royal Saints*, 176–210; Rosser, “Æthelthryth: A Conventional Saint?”; Szarmach, “Æðeldreda in the OE Bede”; Thompson, “St. Æthelthryth”; Viljoen, “Victorious Virgin; Accursed Appetites”; and Waterhouse, “Discourse and Hypersignification.”
- 10 To my knowledge, no individual studies of Eormenhild or Eorcengota have been published, but the cult of Wærburh has received some attention

recently: Lewis, “History, Historiography and Re-writing the Past”; Love, “Et quis me tanto oneri parem faciet?”; Roffe, “The Seventh Century Monastery of Stow Green, Lincolnshire”; and Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 83–115.

- 11 Rollason observes that Bede names Seaxburh as mother to Eorcengota and Hlothhere (“Seaxburh,” 616). Eorcenberht had another son, Egbert, but Bede does not make Seaxburh’s relationship with Egbert explicit; instead, he says that Egbert is the son of Eorcenberht and brother to Hlothhere, who succeeded him as King of Kent (*HE* IV.1, 328–9; 5, 352–3; and 22, 404–5). Since Bede does not name Egbert a stepbrother to Hlothhere, as he does with Sæthryth (see n. 5, above), I accept Egbert as Seaxburh’s son. Rollason also identifies Seaxburh as mother to both Egbert and Hlothhere in *The Mildrith Legend* (30), but does not include Hlothhere in his genealogical chart (45). By contrast, Yorke names Seaxburh’s children as Eormenhild, Eorcengota, and Egbert, clearly drawing upon the hagiographical tradition, in *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (37), but shows Egbert and Hlothhere as brothers in the preceding chart (36).
- 12 Liebermann, *Die Heiligen Englands*, 3–6. Translations of this text are mine. In *A Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain*, editors Williams, Smyth, and Kirby rely on Farmer’s description of Seaxburh in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* to assert that she married Eorcenberht, founded Minster-in-Sheppey, succeeded Æthelthryth as abbess of Ely, and in turn was succeeded by her daughter Eormenhild at Sheppey and at Ely (210–11).
- 13 For editions of these manuscripts – Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud 636 (also known as the Laud Chronicle) (= E) and London, BL, Cotton Domitian A.viii (= F), respectively – see Irvine, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS E, 25, and Baker, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS F, 33. Manuscript E was written at Peterborough, near Ely, and may have been influenced by the regional veneration of the Ely women. MS E is quoted here (which is almost identical to F but for spelling changes) and the translation is by G.N. Garmonsway (see *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 27).
- 14 The oldest manuscript is the Parker Chronicle (= A). See Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS A.
- 15 For discussions of monastic promotion, see Ridyard, *The Royal Saints*, and my “Presenting the Sister Saints of Ely.”
- 16 Bede, *HE* III.8, 236–7.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid., 238–9. Translation mine.
- 19 Mary Dockray-Miller accepts the East Anglian genealogy as presented by the *Kentish Royal Legend* to make a similar point about Bede’s lack of interest in Seaxburh (*Motherhood and Mothering*, 13–15). Dockray-Miller also accepts the twelfth-century presentation of the succession of Ely abbesses and the claim that Hereswith was the mother of Æthelthryth, Seaxburh, and Wihtburh. There is little evidence for the succession of abbesses, but we do know that Hereswith was married not to Anna but to his brother. See Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 23.
- 20 Bede, *HE* III.8, 392–3. Translation mine.

- 21 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 258–61.
- 22 Bede, *HE* III.8, 404–5. Translation mine.
- 23 Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 15–31.
- 24 Liebermann, *Die Heiligen Englands*, 3.
- 25 On Egbert's relation to Seaxburh, see n. 11.
- 26 Liebermann, *Die Heiligen Englands*, 5. Translations of *KRL* are my own. See Love's discussion of the second passage in *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, xxviii.
- 27 Fell, "Saint Æðelþryð," 32–4.
- 28 Liebermann, *Die Heiligen Englands*, 7.
- 29 In addition to the discussion of the Kentish female saints provided by Rollason in *The Mildrith Legend*, see Witney, "The Kentish Royal Saints."
- 30 In her introduction to these edited texts, Rosalind Love persuasively argues that the lections were written by Goscelin and that the *Vita S. Sexburge*, which is also included in one of the Ely manuscripts, was written by another author. She shows that the two share some details, but on the whole the style and composition of each is very different. The most significant difference is that the *vita* includes Seaxburh's foundation of a minster at Sheppey, a detail that is related to the Kentish tradition but not included in Bede's or Goscelin's lections. The writer of the *vita* appears to have used the *Kentish Royal Legend* as a major source. See Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, lxxviii–lxxxvi.
- 31 See the appendix for more details about each lection.
- 32 Bede, *HE* II.5, 150–1. Bede even says here that "tender growth of the Church" suffered "a severe setback" when Eadbald became king: "At uero post mortem Aedilbercti, cum filius eius Eadbald regni gubernacula suscepisset, mango tenellis ibi adhuc ecclesiae crementis detrimento fuit."
- 33 Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, 2–3.
- 34 For a discussion of the tomb placement, see my "Presenting the Sister Saints of Ely," 762–5.
- 35 Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, 2–3.
- 36 Nelson, "Dhuoda," 110.
- 37 Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, 2–5.
- 38 In "Presenting the Sister Saints of Ely," I illustrate the relations between the multiple female saints in the Kentish and East Anglian traditions (760–1).
- 39 Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 168.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 175.
- 41 Pauline Stafford indicates that Queen Edith recognized Bertha's status as a missionary queen, and although Bertha is presented in the *KRL*, she is not listed as a saint (*Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 170).
- 42 Some of these discussions include the following: Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 220–7, 191–5; and Ian Wood, "The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury."
- 43 Bede, *HE* I.25, 74–9.
- 44 Klein, *Ruling Women*, 23–30.

- 45 Ibid., 53–4.
- 46 Bede, *HE* III.8, 236–7. Eadbald’s other children are Eanswith and Eormenred, whose Christian devotion is celebrated in the Kentish hagiographical tradition: Eanswith was abbess at Folkestone and celebrated as a saint; Eormenred’s daughter Domne Eafe produced three daughter saints; and his two sons, the so-called murdered princes, were considered martyrs. For this account, see Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 15–31.
- 47 Cf. the Life of Æthelburh, which Georges Whalen finds is drawn from Bede’s account (“Patronage Engendered,” 132).
- 48 One wonders, too, if the naming of Seaxburh as regent in the *Lambeth Fragment* was somehow developed from a reference in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that records a different queen named Seaxburh who reigned over the West Saxons after her husband’s death. See Baker, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS F, 36.
- 49 Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 86–7. See also Stafford’s discussion of Seaxburh’s regency in *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 169–70.
- 50 Van Houts, “The Flemish Contribution to Biographical Writing,” 116.
- 51 Yorke, “Carriers of the Truth,” 53–4.
- 52 Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, 12–23.

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- 1 Whatley, "Acta Sanctorum," 23.
- 2 Ibid., 59.
- 3 Lapidge, "Roman Martyrs and their Miracles," 115.
- 4 Ibid., 112.
- 5 Delehay, *The Legends of the Saints*, 175.
- 6 Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 17.
- 7 Denomy, *The Old French Lives of Saint Agnes*, 4. See also A. Thompson, "The Legend of St. Agnes," 362. Ambrose is held by scholars to have composed the hymn "Agnes beatae uirginis," which also details the martyr's youthfulness, refusal to make offerings to idols, courage in taking the death blow, and modesty even in death. Since it does not add any important details not contained in *De uirginibus*, in the interests of space I will not address it here. The Latin text of Ambrose's hymn, however, may be found in Fontaine and Charlet, *Ambroise de Milan*, and an English translation is available in White, *Early Christian Latin Poets*, 49–50.
- 8 See Horner, *The Discourse of Enclosure*, 142–3; P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 81–3.
- 9 Augustine, *De trinitate*, IX.6, 7. "From where, after all, is the fire of brotherly love kindled in me when I hear about some man who has endured severe tortures in the fine constancy of faith? And if this man is pointed out to me, I am dead set at once on getting in touch with him, on getting to know him, on binding him to myself in friendship ... And so I love a faithful and brave man with a chaste and brotherly love ... Thus it is that in that eternal truth according to which all temporal things were made we observe with the eye of the mind the form according to which we are and according to which we do anything with true and right reason, either in ourselves or in bodies" (trans. E. Hill, *Trinity*, IX.11, 12).
- 10 See Augustine, *De trinitate*, XV.40, 42.
- 11 de Vogué, *Grégoire le Grand*, 16. "There are some who are kindled to love of the heavenly homeland more by examples than by preaching" (my translation).
- 12 Ambrose, "De uirginibus," ed. Gori, 1.8.48; "You are worthy now to be placed on the same footing with the heavenly beings whose life you live on earth, rather than with humans"; trans. Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 86. See also *On Virginity by St. Ambrose*, trans. Callam, B, VI.27; Ambrose, *De uirginitate liber unus*, 6.27.
- 13 Ambrose, "De uirginibus," ed. Gori, 1.8.52; "What shall I say about the resurrection, whose rewards you already hold? 'In the resurrection,' we are told, 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but they are like the

angels in heaven.’ What is promised to us is already yours, and the object of our longings is a commonplace for you”; trans. Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 88).

14 Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ*, xxv.

15 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.3.11; “Let no one be surprised, then, if those who are coupled with the Lord of angels are compared to angels”; trans. Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 1.3.11.

16 McNerny, *Eloquent Virgins*, 50.

17 Ambrose, “De Cain et Abel,” ed. Schenkl, 1.47. “There is no question that we have to deal here with something that is without sex, yet it fulfils all the offices of both sexes in that the soul conceives and, as in marriage, gives birth”; trans. Savage, *St. Ambrose ... Cain and Abel*, 1.47.

18 For a more complete treatment of the topic of gender fluidity and Ambrose’s contribution to the idea, see McDaniel, “Male and Female He Created Them,” 39–59.

19 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.2.5; “She had devotion beyond her years and virtue beyond her nature, so that it seems to me that she had not a human name but a presage of martyrdom by which she showed what she was to be”; trans. Ramsey, “On Virginity,” *Ambrose*, 74.

20 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.2.8; “She bore credible testimony with respect to God, although she still could not bear credible testimony with respect to a human being, because what is beyond nature belongs to the author of nature”; trans. Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 75.

21 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.2.9; “With what terror the executioner behaved in order to frighten her, with what flattery he sought to persuade her! ... She stood, she prayed, she bowed her neck. You could see the executioner tremble as if he himself had been condemned, his hand shake, his face grow pale as he feared for another’s distress, although the girl did not fear for her own”; Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 75.

22 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 2.4.22–33. For a different reading of the gender ambiguity in Ambrose’s account of Agnes, see Burris, “Reading Agnes.”

23 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.2.9; “How many yearned for her to come to them in marriage! ‘It would be an insult to my bridegroom for me to desire to be attractive. Let him take me who was the first to choose me. Why do you delay, executioner? Let my body perish. I do not want what eyes can love’; trans. Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 75).

24 Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 50.

25 Gneuss, *Handlist*, 175.5, 596, 599, 881. See also Bankert, Wegmann, and Wright, *Ambrose in Anglo-Saxon England*.

26 Lapidge, “Roman Martyrs,” 103; see also Whatley, “Acta Sanctorum,” 38–41.

27 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.6.31; “has no husband, but she does have a bridegroom because – whether as the church in the midst of the people or as the soul in individuals – she is wedded to the Word of God as to an eternal bridegroom without endangering her chastity, and she is barren of

injury and pregnant with reason”; Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 82.

- 28 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.40.41–2; “she was reckoned a child in years, but she was very mature in mind; indeed, in body a young girl, but in the rational soul aged. She was beautiful of countenance, but more beautiful in faithfulness.” All translations from Pseudo-Ambrose are my own.
- 29 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.29–30; “persevering with the same countenance and the same frame of mind she scorned in her spirit his threats just as she had his cajoling.”
- 30 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.48–50; “Do not despise my youthful body in such a way that you should think I wish to make you show favour to me. For faith is found not in years but in understanding, and God omnipotent approves minds more than years.”
- 31 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.6.30.
- 32 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.26; literally, “that she may call Christ her bridegroom.”
- 33 Ambrose, “De uirginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.7.36; “The first thing that women who are to be married desire more than anything else is that they may boast of the beauty of their bridegroom”; Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 83.
- 34 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.40.53, 41.6–7; “nobler than you by far, both in lineage and in rank” and “stronger in power, more lovely in appearance, more delightful in love, and more refined in all that is pleasing.”
- 35 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.6.24, 1.6.30, 7.36–9; Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 81, 83–4.
- 36 Prudentius, “*Peristephanon*: Passio Agnetis,” lines 38–49.
- 37 Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 1.8.51; “But for you, holy virgins, there is special protection – you who with undefiled chastity are in attendance at the Lord’s sacred bedchamber. It is not surprising that the angels fight on behalf of you who fight to maintain an angelic way of life”; trans. Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 87).
- 38 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.58–42.1 and 42.4; “I have an angel of the Lord as the guardian of my body.”
- 39 Weber et al., *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgata versionem*, Apoc. 19:7–8. “Let us rejoice and exult and give glory to him, for they have come for the marriage of the Lamb and his bride has prepared herself. It was granted to her that she clothe herself with a shining white linen garment. The perfect deeds of the holy ones, truly, are the linen garment.” My translation. Cf. the translation in Challoner, *The Holy Bible, Douay Rheims Version* (1971), Apoc. 19:7–8. I prefer the phrase “the perfect deeds of the holy ones” to the *Douay Rheims* “justifications” as a more exact, less theologically loaded translation suitable to the early medieval understanding of the idea in play.
- 40 Matt. 17:2. For white clothes symbolizing purity, see Is. 1:18, Dan. 11:35, 12:10, and Apoc. 3:4–5, 3:18, 6:11.
- 41 Cf. Ambrose, “De virginibus,” ed. Gori, 3.1.1, which comments on the symbolism of dedicated virgins changing their clothing as a sign of their vow.

- 42 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.43.29–30.
- 43 Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 21.
- 44 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.44.23–6; “and for your edification, o virgins of Christ, I thought the account of her suffering should be directed, imploring the love of the Holy Spirit that our toil may be able to find fruit in the sight of the Lord by your imitation.”
- 45 Gwara, *Aldhelmi Malmesbiriensis Prosa de uirginitate*, §XLV; Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*, “Prosa de uirginitate,” §XLV and “Carmen de uirginitate,” 1925–74. All translations from Aldhelm in this article are my own, but published translations are available in Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, and Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*.
- 46 McDaniel, “Pride Goes before a Fall.” For another perspective on Aldhelm’s *De uirginitate* and his treatment of female saints, see Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 111–24.
- 47 Gwara., *Prosa de uirginitate*, §X, 111–5; “And nevertheless, more’s the pity, it commonly happens that the ranks [of chastity] are turned upside down, so that the rank of the inferior life, everywhere gradually gaining ground takes the place of the tepidly sluggish higher rank ... and the rank that was considered inferior because of its carelessness in the former way of life, afterwards becomes the foremost, inflamed with the fire of divine love, calling to mind the Gospel saying, ‘one who is forgiven much, loves much,’ and that rank that, rejecting the scorned allurements of the world like the scourings of refuse and driving back the enticements of fleshly extravagance, had been in second place in holy intention, having manfully chosen the basic training of the novitiate of the chaste way of life ... and burning with desire for the eternal life ... takes first place through perseverance in its great labor.”
- 48 Ibid., §XLV, 631–3; “who, for the sake of preserving her purity, scorns like the pale yellow slough of the stinking sewer every glorious gift of adornments offered by her suitor, the son of the prefect, that he might obtain the desired marriage.” Cf. “Carmen de uirginitate,” in Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*, 1929–41.
- 49 Ibid., 633; “fomenter of sin, nurse of crime, fodder of death” (italics in original). Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.40.50–1.
- 50 Gwara, *Prosa de uirginitate*, §XLV, 633; “he has pledged (betrothed) me with the ring of his own faithfulness, he has encircled me with lively and flashing gems, he has clothed me with a robe of state, woven with gold” (italics in original). The parallel passage in “Carmen de uirginitate” is paraphrased rather than quoted (lines 1941–45). Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.40.52–3, 1.41.1–2, 1.41.3.
- 51 Gwara, *Prosa de uirginitate*, §LVIII; “For every prerogative of pure virginity is retained solely in the protection of a free mind rather than being contained in the narrow confines of the flesh, and it is wholesomely preserved by the inflexible decision of the voluntary will rather than being completely reduced to nothing by the confined servitude of the body.”
- 52 Ibid., §XLV, 633–5; “And although on account of these things she was forced

into the detestable brothel of prostitution ... nevertheless, protected by the brilliant splendour of a great light, she delights in sight of angels and she is endowed the divine robes of her Lord.”

53 See *ibid.*, §XXXV, §XXXVII, §XL, §XLIII, §XLV, §XLVI, §LI.

54 *Ibid.*, §LVI, §LVIII.

55 Lapidge, “Roman Martyrs,” 112, 114.

56 Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature*, 328–30.

57 *Ibid.*, 328. See also G. Brown, *Bede the Venerable*, 73–7.

58 Bede, *In natali S. Agnetis*, 414–15, lines 5–8; “Agnes has entered the golden court of heaven in triumph, and she rejoices, joined to the sweet marriage of the Lamb.” All translations from Bede are my own.

59 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.43.49–51; “a military host of virgins who, all being clothed with robes woven with gold, passed by with an enormous light; among whom they see the most blessed Agnes shining in a like garment.”

60 *Ibid.*, 1.41.3.

61 *Ibid.*, 1.43.54–5; “rejoice for me and wish me joy, because I have received a bright home with all these and have been joined with him in heaven.”

62 Cf. Prudentius, “*Peristephanon*: *Passio Agnetis*,” lines 52–3.

63 Bede, *In natali S. Agnetis*, 16; “For the love of Christ.”

64 *Ibid.*, 19; “she perseveres steadfast in the faith.”

65 *Ibid.*, 23–4; “but no one could carry away the robe of the heart within.”

66 See Bede’s explanation of the priestly linen garment in *De Tabernaculo*, 3.8.

67 “Whoever therefore is baptized in Christ, you are clothed in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. You all indeed are one in Christ Jesus.”

68 See the comments made by the soldier who exchanges clothing with the Virgin of Antioch in Ambrose, “*De virginibus*,” ed. Gori, 2.4.29.

69 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.42.25.

70 *Ibid.*, 1.42.23–5; “The garment was, indeed, so suited to the measure of her small body, and was of such a dazzling whiteness, that no one would doubt that it was prepared by hands other than those of an angel.”

71 *Ibid.*, 1.42.32–4; “seeing such a quantity of light surround her gave no honour to God, but mocking on the very threshold, before he had even grasped her with his hand, he collapsed on his face and, strangled by the devil, breathed his last.”

72 Bede, *In natali S. Agnetis*, 44; “to the stars.”

73 Cf. Prudentius, “*Peristephanon*: *Passio Agnetis*,” lines 91–3.

74 Concerning Ælfric’s intended audience, see Gretsche, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 19, 54–5.

75 LS, Preface, 44–5.4; “whom monks honour among themselves with their services.” All translations from Old English are my own.

76 *Ibid.*, 48.4; “laypeople did not know.”

77 P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 1–2.

- 78 LS 1.37–8.12; “the Holy Ghost is the Will and the Love of them [i.e., of the Father and the Son].”
- 79 LS 1.112–14.16; “Just as we said before, the soul has in its nature a likeness to the Holy Trinity in that it has memory, understanding, and will.”
- 80 LS 7.8–9.170.
- 81 Ibid., 12.; “she loved Christ.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.40.41.
- 82 LS 7.27–8.170–2; “I have another lover unlike you in nobility.”
- 83 Ibid., 45–8.172; “From his mouth I receive milk and honey; now already I am embraced by his pure arms, his fair body is united to mine and his blood decorates my eyes.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.9–11.
- 84 LS 7.58–62, 172; “When I love him, I am altogether pure; when I touch him, I am unstained; when I have received him, I am a virgin still. And issue ceases not in that wedded state; there is increase without pain and incessant fruitfulness.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.15–7.
- 85 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.40.45; LS 7.20, 170.
- 86 Morrison, “The Figure of *Christus Sponsus*,” 10.
- 87 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.27–30; LS 7.83–4 ... 96, 174.
- 88 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.43; LS 7.73–96 and 105, 176, 174.
- 89 LS 7.110–15; 176; “The Almighty commends the minds of men more than their great age; and belief is not in years, but is in wise understandings. Let your gods rage if they are able to do so; let them themselves command that we pray to them. If you are unable to do this, see! Afflict us howsoever you desire!” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.49–53.
- 90 LS 7.121, 123–5; 131, 176; “the Christians will not then be able to save you,” and “If you knew my God, you would not say these words. I despise your threats without concern because I know the strength of my Lord ... I have God’s holy angel with me.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.41.55, 42.1–2.
- 91 LS 7.145–7, 178; “the virgin’s hair clothed her all around as soon as the executioners wrenched off her clothes, and the hair covered her over on each side alike.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.42.14–5.
- 92 LS 7.149–53, 178; “but she immediately encountered there a shining angel of God, so that no man was able to look upon her or touch her because of that intense light. For that house shone everywhere just as the sun in the day and so the more eagerly they looked, thus forcefully [the light] bedazzled their eyes.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.42.16–20.
- 93 LS 7.159–60, 178; “Then that house of prostitutes became a prayer-house for men and women, and each one who went in worshiped God because of the heavenly light that shone in that house.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.42.25–6.
- 94 LS 7.184–91, 180; “Why are the others alive who came in here except because they worshiped the almighty God who compassionately clothed me and sent to me his angel, who defended my body which from the cradle was dedicated to Christ? With disgraceful intention your shameless son ran to me, but the angel struck him down and gave him over to the devil, who

immediately killed him.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.42.47–54.

95 *LS* 7.197, 180; “it is time that the Lord’s power be revealed.” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.42.56.

96 *LS* 7.234–9, 182–4; “That which I have believed, that I see; that which I desired, that I now have. I confess you with my mouth and with my heart and with all my inward being I long for you, the one true God, who reigns with your Son and with the Holy Ghost, one almighty God forever!” Cf. Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis*, 1.43.23–7.

97 Bede, *In natali S. Agnetis*, 414–15. Cf. PL 94.626–7. My translation.

- 1 The immediate audience for *Lives of Saints* is Ælfric's patron, Æthelweard, and Æthelweard's son, Æthelmær, at whose request the collection of monastic observances reflected in *Lives of Saints* was written; see both the Latin and the Old English prefaces (*LS*, "Preface," 2–6) and Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 119–21. For a discussion of patronage and audience for *Lives of Saints*, see Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 9–13, 45–51, and his "The Audience of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*," 228–63; Cubitt, "Ælfric's Lay Patrons." As Mechthild Gretsch has pointed out, Ælfric did not have the same level of control over the transmission of *Lives of Saints* as he did over some of his other works, thus exacerbating the potential danger of unguided reading (*Ælfric and the Cult of Saints*, 161–2). On the transmission of *Lives of Saints* more generally, see J. Hill, "The Dissemination of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*," and "The Preservation and Transmission of Ælfric's *Saints' Lives*."
- 2 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 110–32. See also Roy, "A Virgin Acts Manfully." For Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, see Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*; Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*; Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*.
- 3 Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 24.
- 4 Horner, "The Violence of Exegesis," 23. See also Horner, *The Discourse of Enclosure*, esp. chap. 3.
- 5 Rossi-Reder, "Embodying Christ, Embodying Nation," 191.
- 6 Lees, "Engendering Religious Desire."
- 7 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.
- 8 This approach is one strand of the variety of critical methodologies known collectively as "new materialisms," which set out to rethink the impact of materiality, especially the non-human, on the social world; see, for example, the special issue of *Theory, Culture & Society* (19:5–6, 2002); Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*; Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*; Grosz, *The Nick of Time*; Coole, "Rethinking Agency"; and, more generally, Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*.
- 9 Lees, "Engendering Religious Desire," 35.
- 10 Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*, 10.
- 11 Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, esp. 27–59.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 13 Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*, 15; emphasis in original.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 17 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, esp. 13–63.
- 18 The *Lives* of the transvestite saints, Eugenia and Euphrosyne, explore this theme at great length (although the latter is not by Ælfric himself); see Roy, "A Virgin Acts Manfully"; Szarmach, "Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia," and "St. Euphrosyne: Holy Transvestite."
- 19 Jerome, *Commentaria in Epistolam ad Ephesios*, III.5.28; PL 26, 533; Heine,

The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome, 237–8. See also Roy, “A Virgin Acts Manfully,” 8–13. But note also Rhonda McDaniel, in this volume, who traces another possibility – that of a “metagender” that transcends male and female and is available to saints of both sexes who pursue virginity – in the writings of Ambrose.

20 See *LS* 2, *LS* 4, *LS* 7, *LS* 8, *LS* 9, *LS* 10, *LS* 34, and *LS* 35.

21 Mills, *Suspended Animation*.

22 As Burrus demonstrates through Jerome’s *Life of Paul* and *Letter to Eustochium*, Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*, and Augustine’s reflections on his mother, Monica, in the *Confessions* (*The Sex Lives of Saints*, 53–90).

23 Pulsiano, “Blessed Bodies,” 14.

24 Treharne, “The Invisible Woman.” But see also Wilcox, who makes a case for women as likely readers of *Lives of Saints* (“The Audience of Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*,” 251–2).

25 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 130.

26 See also Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, 133–53.

27 This is not the case with many of Ælfric’s male martyrs, such as Sebastian, Alban, Apollinaris, Oswald, Edmund, and Vincent, who suffer the pain of their tortures as models of Christian masculinity; see *LS* 5, *LS* 19, *LS* 22, *LS* 26, *LS* 32, and *LS* 37. But see also the martyrdom of George (*LS* 14), who, like the female martyrs, is protected from suffering by God.

28 *LS* 7.42–7, 172. All translations are my own.

29 Rosalind Love, in the current volume, notes that Agnes’s prayer for conjugal bliss becomes a model for later hagiographers such as Goscelin.

30 *LS* 7.332, 188.

31 *LS* 34.1–99, 356–62. Julian converts his wife Basilissa in the same way (*LS* 4). Depicting conjugal love as a model for spirituality echoes the Song of Songs, as well as the long-standing debates about whether to read such depictions literally or allegorically. See Upchurch, *Ælfric’s Lives of the Virgin Spouses*, esp. 101 and 105.

32 Chance also notes the overt sexualization of Agnes’s body in a Roman patriarchal context (*The Literary Subversion*, 28–31).

33 *LS* 7.141–3, 178.

34 *LS* 7.144–51, 178.

35 *LS* 7.245, 184.

36 *LS* 35.248–9, 392.

37 *LS* 9.127, 216.

38 *LS* 35. But see also the *Life of Agatha*, where the suitor tries to tempt the virgin to sin by sending her to a prostitute for “reeducation” before he resorts to torture; see below, p. 263–5.

39 The importance of maintaining virginity at all costs, however, is illustrated by historical reports of nuns mutilating themselves by cutting off their noses in order to deter would-be rapists; see Schulenberg, “The Heroics of Virginity,” 41–62.

- 40 Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*, 1.16.10–17; CCSL 47; Dyson, *The City of God against the Pagans*, 26. Augustine further elaborates on the impossibility of defilement without volition, particularly in cases of rape, in 1.16–19.
- 41 LS 9.84–93, 214.
- 42 See, for example, Schulenberg, who cites Jerome’s *Commentaria in Jonam* (PL 25, 1117–52) and *Aduersus Jovinianum* (PL 23, 205–338), as well as Ambrose’s *De uirginibus* (PL 16, 187–232), and offers various examples of women going to extreme lengths to prevent being defiled through rape (“The Heroics of Virginity”).
- 43 LS 8.12–13, 196.
- 44 LS 8.85–90, 200.
- 45 LS 8.115–21, 202.
- 46 LS 8.119–20, 202.
- 47 LS 8.126, 202.
- 48 Such spectacles of mutilation extend beyond *Lives of Saints*, as the poem *Juliana* demonstrates. Juliana’s story follows the general outlines of the female martyr, and her beauty is emphasized throughout the poem. A sexually attractive body is both the pretext for the narrative – her beauty inflames the pagan Eleusius’s desire – and the means by which the narrative progresses. Juliana’s body remains central to the story, as it is put on display before the heathen crowd with repeated emphasis on its beauty, even as she is hung by her hair and beaten or placed into a blazing fire. But she also grapples physically with the devil who is sent to torment her. See Woolf, *Juliana*.
- 49 Julia Kristeva writes, “The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder” (*Powers of Horror*, 12–13; emphasis in original). Such “marking-out” takes place through rituals of defilement: “Defilement, by means of the rituals that consecrate it, is perhaps, for a social aggregate, only one of the possible foundings of abjection bordering the frail identity of the speaking being. In this sense, abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic order, on the individual as well as on the collective level” (ibid., 67–8). Teresa Brennan also notes that, in the psychoanalytic tradition, “women ... have carried the negative affects” (*The Transmission Effect*, 15).
- 50 Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 186; emphasis in original.
- 51 Recounted in the second-century Greek *Proteuangelium Jacobi*. See von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 1–50, which was transmitted through a wide range of translations throughout the Middle Ages; see also Clayton, *The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary*, 7–18.
- 52 Liebermann, in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, vol. 2, Alfred 11–11.3. See Hough, “Alfred’s *Domboc*.” More generally, see Horner, “The Language of Rape”; Coleman, “Rape in Anglo-Saxon England.”
- 53 See above, p. 253–4.

54 LS 4.281, 106.

55 In LS 23B, Mary of Egypt is the only woman not designated as *virgo* in the rubric (for obvious reasons); see Norris, “Vitas Matrum.” Mary and Euphrosyne (LS 33) are the only two women in the collection to die a natural death; neither *vita* is considered to be Ælfric’s work.

56 LS 2. Helene Scheck argues that the Lives of both Eugenia and Euphrosyne show women whose attempts to denounce their female bodies end in rhetorical failure, as “the texts uncover the error, re-dress the women properly as women, and in so doing redress the affront to proper social order” (*Reform and Resistance*, 96).

57 See, for example, Roy, “A Virgin Acts Manfully,” 20; Gulley, “Suffering and Salvation.”

58 Talbot, *The Life of Christina of Markyate*.

59 Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

60 Rubin writes: “If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it” (“The Traffic in Women,” 174).

61 Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 170–91. Such an analysis follows Marx’s logic of the commodity: “The product becomes a commodity. The commodity becomes exchange value. The exchange value of the commodity acquires an existence of its own alongside the commodity ... in which (1) it is exchangeable with all other commodities, (2) it has hence become a commodity in general, and *its natural specificity is extinguished*, and (3) the measure of its exchangeability ... has been determined” (*Grundrisse*, 165; emphasis added).

62 Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 180; emphasis in original.

63 See Chance, *Woman as Hero*; Sklute, “*Freoðuwebbe* in Old English Poetry.”

64 “Ordinatus est autem Paulinus episcopus a Iusto archiepiscopo sub die XII kalendarum Augustarum anno ab incarnatione Domini DCXXV, et sic cum praefata uirgine ad regem Eduinum quasi comes copulae carnalis aduenit, sed ipse potius toto animo intendens ut gentem, quam adibat, ad agnitionem ueritatis aduocans iuxta uocem apostoli uni uero sponso uirginem castam exhiberet Christo” [Paulinus was consecrated bishop by Archbishop Justus, on 21 July in the year of our Lord 625, and so in the princess’s train he came to Edwin’s court, outwardly bringing her to her marriage according to the flesh. But more truly his whole heart was set on calling the people to whom he was coming to the knowledge of the truth; his desire was to present it, in the words of the apostle, as a pure virgin to be espoused to one husband, even Christ] (*HE* II.9, 164–5).

65 As Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors note, Bede here echoes 2 Cor. 11:2: “aemulor enim vos Dei aemulatione despondi enim vos uni viro virginem castam exhibere Christo” [For I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God. For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ] (*HE* II.9, n. 1).

66 As Stacy Klein has argued, Bede’s emphasis on Christian queens as peaceweavers between men and God downplays their active role in

converting their pagan husbands; see her *Ruling Women*, esp. 17–52.

67 *LS* 9.36–40, 212; emphasis added.

68 *LS* 7.13–14, 170.

69 “Agathes wæs geicged sum gesælig mæden / on ðæræ scyre sicilia snotor and gelyfed ... Ða com him [Quintianus] to earan be Agathes drohtnunge / and smeade hu he mihte þæt mæden him begitan” [A certain noble maiden called Agatha, wise and faithful, was in the province of Sicily ... Then word of Agatha’s conduct and wisdom came to his [Quintianus’s] ears and he considered how he might get that maiden for himself] (*LS* 8.1–2, 194, and 7–8, 196).

70 “Ða com sum heretoga se wæs gehaten flaccus / mid mycelre fare to þære mæran petronellan / wolde hi niman to wife for hire wlitigan hiwe” [Then a certain ruler, who was called Flaccus, came with a great company to the glorious Petronilla, wished to take her as a wife because of her beautiful countenance] (*LS* 10.252–4, 236).

71 *LS* 35.75–98, 382.

- 1 Pulsiano provided an excellent preliminary survey of these saints and their hagiographies in "Blessed Bodies."
- 2 For a survey of Latin hagiography in England throughout the Anglo-Saxon period and beyond, see Lapidge and Love, "The Latin Hagiography of England and Wales."
- 3 The Anglo-Saxons' disinclination to write up their saints was explored by Fell, "Edward, King and Martyr"; on the Norman point of view see Ridyard, "*Condigna Veneratio*," and more recently Hayward, "Translation-Narratives in Post-Conquest Hagiography."
- 4 Upchurch, *Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses*; cf. also Donovan, *Women Saints' Lives in Old English Prose*; Magennis, *The Old English Life of Saint Mary of Egypt*.
- 5 Schulenberg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*; Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*; Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*.
- 6 BHL 5960; Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 108–43; on the dating see Sharpe, "Goscelin's St Augustine and St Mildrith."
- 7 Frank Barlow provided a biography of Goscelin as appendix C to his edition, *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, 133–49; for a more recent account see Hollis, "Goscelin's Writings and the Wilton Women," in Hollis et al., *Writing the Wilton Women*, 217–44.
- 8 Barlow provided a list of well-attested and attributed works (*Life of King Edward*, 146–9); see also Lapidge and Love, "Latin Hagiography," 225–33. The most recent addition to the canon of his works is a *Vita* of Eadwold of Cerne; see Licence, "Goscelin of Saint-Bertin and the Life of St. Eadwold of Cerne."
- 9 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 112–5.
- 10 Ibid., 120–1. All translations provided in this chapter are my own, unless otherwise credited.
- 11 Ibid., 120: "genere et rebus potens ... litterisque eruditissima."
- 12 *Vita Mildrethe*, c. x; Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 122: "The tempter inflamed him to love of the virgin, and with these flames, this battering-ram, assailed God's citadel. The lover, both on his own behalf and through his friends, asked for marriage in no moderate degree: he offered land-posessions, towns, castles, communities, moveable treasures, riches and the honours of Francia as a dowry. But the abbess rose up more bitterly: she strove with total insanity to bring them together, she overwhelms the girl with prayers, flatteries, gifts and infinite promises, hisses about the world's glory, urges illustrious men, noble matrons, ordinary sisters – as if the church's authority might sway her – to press the marriage, batters her, unmoved, with threats and terrors. She even lines up the bishop as in favour, or in agreement. What enticements, which incitements, fit to tame iron hearts, did she not say?"
- 13 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 121: "in curribus et equis Pharaonicis et machinis Babylonicis, id est subiugalibus sibi animabus uentosis et lubricis, hanc a foris expugnare aggreditur."
- 14 Ibid., 122–3.

- 15 *Vita Mildrethe*, c. x; Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 123–4: “This she [Wilcoma] follows up with punishments, beatings, lashes, and then again soothings, prayers and horrendous invocations of divine power, to get her to acquiesce. Then at last what constancy, what faith of the martyrs would not waver, battered by the majesty of such a name, though it did not fear butchers or deaths. O struggle harsher under Christian authority than under Neronian godlessness! For to be killed for Christ’s sake by an idolater is a most certain prize: but by someone urging in Christ’s name things that are contrary for a Christian: where is the escape from that? ... And so adamant toughness remains yet more insuperable, and resists like a great crag. Just as once the precious martyr Lucy could not be hauled bodily into the brothel with a thousand men and a thousand oxen dragging her, so Mildreth, home of the Holy Spirit, stands immoveable in mind.”
- 16 *BHL* 4992; Mombritius, *Sanctuarium*, 2: 58–9.
- 17 Townsend, “Anglo-Latin Hagiography.”
- 18 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 108: “You her servants, devotees of a mistress given by God.”
- 19 The affair is described in Sharpe, “Goscelin’s St Augustine,” 503–4.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 504.
- 21 *Vita Mildrethe*, c. xi; Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 124: “There stands the utterly invincible whole-offering to the Lord, who, preferring virginity to life and death to marriage, turning the choice into a triumph, is soon thrust into the torrid midst of the incandescent furnace. Then, with the furnace door carefully closed, all the heat is kept in, so as to be stoked up fiercely for snuffing out a life. But against those trusting in the protection of the God of heaven and in the shadow of the Lord’s wings, every effort of evil-doers is brought to nought [Ps. 56:2]. No heat at all, no burning touched her, just as no lust had stained her. What could material fires do to her, against whom the enticements of the vices and the gates of hell did not prevail? [Matt. 16:18] The fires raged around her in her dungeon, she smiled as if at light breezes in the fresh air. Burning torches surrounded the lady with bright reverence, offering their illumination rather than torments, the flame its light rather than fright, and the fires made the enclosed prison as bright as day. The torrid furnace becomes the virgin’s bridal-chamber, her fiery abode a sunny pavilion, the glowing coals a courtyard of roses.”
- 22 Pseudo-Ambrose, *Passio Agnetis* (*BHL* 156), PL 17.735–42, at col. 741A.
- 23 *Vita Mildrethe*, c. xii; Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 125: “Thus, when the door was opened for her to come out, the virgin appeared utterly radiant, refined in the heat like gold, like the dawn rising from her saffron couch, like a bride advancing from her boudoir, like a dove glimpsed at her window.”
- 24 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 126; *Vita Mildrethe*, c. xiii.
- 25 *BHL* 8753; Talbot, “The Life of Saint Wulsin of Sherborne by Goscelin”; for a translation see Love, “The Life of St Wulfsize of Sherborne.”
- 26 Kitchen, *Saints’ Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender*, 53–7.
- 27 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 138, quoting from the *Acta Vincentii martyris* (*BHL* 8628), c. 4, ed. *Acta Sanctorum*, Januarii II, 397.

- 28 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 108.
- 29 BHL 2641–2; Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 90–104.
- 30 Ibid., 93.
- 31 This is the dating which emerges from Goscelin's account of the translation, said to occur the Monday after Whitsunday on 18 May; see *Translatio et Miraculo S. Mildrethe* (BHL 5691) ed. David W. Rollason, "Goscelin of Canterbury's account of the Translation and Miracles of St. Mildrith: an edition with notes," *Mediaeval Studies* (48 1986): 139–210; and *Libellus contra inanes S. uirginis S. Mildrethe usurpatore* (BHL 5926) ed. Marvin L. Colker, "A Hagiographic Polemic," *Mediaeval Studies* 39 (1977): 60–108. Whitsunday was on 17 May in 1030; a misreading of Goscelin's words led Frank Barlow to place the event in 1035, when Whitsunday fell on 18 May ("Two Notes," 651). David Rollason followed Barlow's dating, even though he was aware that Goscelin intended the year 1030 (*Mildrith Legend*, 19, and note 27); Richard Sharpe argued that Goscelin's own dating should be accepted, in "Goscelin's St Augustine," and then again in "The Date of St Mildreth's Translation."
- 32 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 19. This was recorded by Goscelin in his *Historia translationis S. Augustini*, II.4, *Acta Sanctorum*, Maii VI, 433C: "Hoc desideriosus abbas ... Mildredam, ante principale altare Apostolorum conditam, in porticum Patris Augustini transtulit; et iuxta Aquilonalem parietem, contra S. Augustinum, collocauit."
- 33 In the past, scholars have toyed with the notion that Goscelin actually composed the *passio* too; thus, Barlow included it among the works attributed to Goscelin (*Life of King Edward*, 149), but the text's prose style is quite different from Goscelin's.
- 34 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 98–100.
- 35 The relationship of Goscelin's text to his probable source has recently been explored afresh from a firmly literary perspective by Pabst, "Goscelin von St. Bertin."
- 36 Love, "Et quis me tanto oneri parem faciet?"
- 37 *Acta Sanctorum*, Iulii III.90–102.
- 38 Hollis et al., *Writing the Wilton Women*, 217.
- 39 See Grierson, "The Translation of the Relics"; Huyghebaert, "La translation de Sainte Amelberge à Gand."
- 40 Radbod's so-called *Tomellus* (BHL 322) is edited in *Acta Sanctorum*, Iulii III.88–90.
- 41 *Vita Amelberge*, c. 10; *Acta Sanctorum*, Iulii, III.93–4: "Then, amidst kisses and embraces, he revealed his youthful soul's desire, and begged her to be named his bride and joined to him in matrimony. But he could not entice her with flatteries, or bend her will with threats, to share his love, because, founded on a wall of faith, she remained like an unstormable tower. The Lord's virgin, turning her eyes heavenwards, silently begged the angels' aid, called down the apostles' presence, and by their mediation, murmurs this sacrifice of prayer pleasing to God: 'Sweet Jesus ... have regard for the contrition of Your handmaid. To You, as my immortal Groom, I have vowed

my modesty's virginal state, and up until now I have kept the pledge of faith. Creator of chastity, preserve the flower of my virginity, dedicated to You. Descend, Lord, to my prayer, and quell the raging of this tyrant, lest the contact of my body with his lust be made a laughing-stock."

- 42 *Acta Sanctorum*, Julii, III.94C: "a most outstanding young man."
- 43 *Vita Amelberge*, c. 13; *Acta Sanctorum*, Julii, III.94D–E: "She lay panting on the ground and thus urged the Creator of her integrity: 'Lord King of the angels and receiver of sinners, grant in your name, that the power of this earthly tyrant should not prevail over me. Sweetness of my soul, let not the poisons of carnal coupling enter me. My glory, let your handmaid not be confounded, that I be stripped of chastity's stole. I have chosen you as my Groom, I have desired your loveliness ... That I may give pleasure at Your wedding feast, I beseech you that I be not despoiled of the rings of chastity and the necklaces of golden virginity. Look down, most loving one, from heaven, and save me from the lion's mouth.'"
- 44 *BHL* 156; PL 17.735–42; compare, for example, c. 3 (col. 736): "annulo fidei suae subarrhauit me ... Ornauit inestimabili dextrochirio dexteram meam, et collum meum cinxit lapidibus pretiosis: tradidit auribus meis inestimabiles margaritas, et circumdedit me vernantibus atque coruscantibus gemmis. Posuit signum suum super faciem meam, ut nullum praeter ipsum amatorem admittam. Induit me cyclade auro texta, et immensis monilibus ornauit me" [He has betrothed me with the ring of his faith ... he has adorned my right hand with a bracelet beyond price, and girt my neck with precious stones: in my ears he has put priceless pearls, and bedecked me all around with brilliant and sparkling gems. He has put his mark upon my face, so that I admit no lover apart from him. He has clad me in a shot-gold robe and adorned me with weighty necklaces].
- 45 *Vita Amelberge*, c. 19; *Acta Sanctorum*, Julii III.95F–96A: "Meanwhile the Lord Jesus, duly mindful of His dear one, lovingly decided to glorify her yet further because of her virginity's privilege, and to tend his Bride under his protecting wing. And since it was the counsel of the Most High that the glory of her virginal modesty should be crowned with the palm of martyrdom, a great storm of persecution preceded the triumph of her passion."
- 46 *Acta Sanctorum*, Julii III.94F.
- 47 *Ibid.*, III.95E.
- 48 For an analysis of Bovo's *Relatio de Inuentione et Eleuatione Sancti Bertini* (*BHL* 1296) in context, see Ugé, *Creating the Monastic Past in Flanders*, 72–90. Folcard's account of Bovo occurs in the dedicatory preface to his *Vita of Bertin* (*BHL* 1293), *Acta Sanctorum*, Septembris II.604–13, at 604.
- 49 *Vita Amelberge*, cc. 35–7; *Acta Sanctorum*, Julii III.100A–D: "When she had finished her prayer, she took a knife and shaved off the locks on her head, and covered it with a holy veil; she has a soul not unworthy of Christ's famed young warriors, the martyrs, I mean, who under the Deciuses and Neros triumphed by iron and fire. They were made a noble line! ... Then the King, meanwhile seeing that she did not comply with his wishes, and that his plan had been detected, so that God's virgin, whom he was going to pounce

on silently at home, had fled into church, took to boldness instead of wisdom. Very shamelessly he burst into the church after her, which was not permitted ... Then, stirred to anger, the cruelty of a savage tyrant prevailed over the magnanimity of royal duty. And with all his might twisting her shoulder, he broke the bone in the virginal shoulder, truly recognized a Bride of God and made her Christ's martyr. Yet the Lord's virgin did not rise up from the place where she lay, until the Lord Jesus appeared to his dear one as she wept and prayed, and restored His chosen one to full health. Thus, the most blessed Virgin, imitating the angels' modesty, harvested the noble fruit of passion from the seeds of chastity; truly, I say, thrice and more blessed, whom the Lord, in order to bestow the victory crown for a twice-run race, garlanded with the lily of white virginity and the ruddy palm of martyrdom!"

- 50 *Acta Sanctorum*, Julii III.95E: "En ob gratiam tui, tot laquei tuæ obtenduntur Virgini, quam ut tibi eripiant, etiam ipsi dæmones, tum dæmonum satellites undique impugnant."
- 51 *Vita Amelberge*, c. 4; *Acta Sanctorum*, Julii III.92B–C: "We who have borne the burden and heat of the day have managed no such thing, and to you, blessed virgin, divine love has granted the grace of sanctity to scale the heights of virginal glory: with the virginity by which you have earned the right to ascend to the bridal-chamber of the immortal Groom, you have won praise and glory forever. The ancient foe sought to trick you by means of that boy, but has failed, with his powers broken, and hence Christ the Bridegroom has given you honour and splendour. May you then flourish with Thecla, prevail with Agnes, and with Mary may yours be the best part."
- 52 For example, in his *Collations* I.8. On Mary and Martha as the types of the contemplative/active, see the summarizing essay by Solignac and Donnat, "Marthe et Marie." Reference to Mary's best part comes to be something of a trope in hagiography. See Petschenig, 14.
- 53 *Acta Sanctorum*, Julii III.90B.
- 54 *BHL* 8736b; Colker, "Texts of Jocelyn of Canterbury," 418–31.
- 55 *Vita Wulfhilde*, c. 2; Colker, "Texts," 421: "See! all the little snares, see all the little nets by which Christ's little bird seemed totally captured: see! King Edgar sitting at a party, with Wenflæd next to him, not sick at all but making merry before a royal banquet! Oh most mighty Jesus, what then was she to do, that soul burning for Thee? How much more gladly would she have looked upon Thecla's beasts, Agatha's torturer, Lucy's pyres! But how else could she seem to be truly Your bride, with true love, except if these trials were to test her?"
- 56 *Vita Wulfhilde*, c. 3; Colker, "Texts," 422: "Just as once the raving Paschasius strove with all the strength of men, oxen and ropes to drag Lucy, that immovable pillar of faith, into the brothel, so also the king tried to entice Wulfhild to his side, with all the coils of delegations, gifts, fawnings. But just as blessed Lucy resisted with unmoved body like a vast rock, so also this virgin, her soul founded in Christ, endured uncapturable."
- 57 Colker, "Texts," 423.

- 58 Ibid., 421: “callens ad decipiendam.”
- 59 Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal*, 156.
- 60 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 250, and 71, n. 101.
- 61 Van Houts, “The Flemish Contribution,” 123, n. 78.
- 62 I explored these strategies in the introduction to my edition of the Ely Lives, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, cvi–cxiii.
- 63 See Colker, “Texts,” 398–417 (*Vita et uirtutes S. Ethelburge*) and 455–8 (*Lectiones de. S. Hildelitha*), based on Bede, *HE* IV.6–10, 354–64.
- 64 Both are edited in Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, 28–51 and 54–83.
- 65 See Ibid., xvii.
- 66 Ibid., 34–5.
- 67 *Vita Wihtburge*, c. 1; Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, 54–7: “As soon as she was able to understand, she charmed her senses with Christ’s name, which is an overflowing ointment [Song of Songs 1:2], ethereal nectar, and when she drank in the dew of His sweet savour with thirsty love, she said, ‘Farewell wooing kings and kings’ sons, make your marriages you sovereigns and suitors, I have found a bride-groom whom my soul loves [Song of Songs 3:4], and I am inseparably bound to him in marriage.’ The girl grew up, and the hopes of those who set store by her beauty were dashed. This one offered kingdoms, that one estates, another infinite treasures, but the maiden remained immovably fixed upon her Christ and a dowry of the whole world. Whoever might whisper blandishments, whoever might thunder out threats, the bride, devoted to one alone, sings out her love-song with well-tuned cymbals: ‘My beloved is mine and I am his [Song of Songs 2:16]. He has placed his mark on my forehead, so that I shall accept no lover except Him’ [*Passio Agnetis*, c. 3]. Thus, precious Wihtburh either outdid in her constancy the pestering princes, or happily outpaced them in peace, and took refuge in her nun’s profession, where she sweetly rested, trusting in the shadow of the wings of God [Ps. 56:2].”
- 68 Love, “Mildburh of Much Wenlock and her Continental Hagiographer,” paper given at the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists Conference, Munich 2005. I argued for Goscelin’s authorship on the basis of recognizable style and choice of themes, together with a seeming reference in the preface to the author’s exiled status. I hope to return to the matter in a forthcoming edition and translation of the text. The *Vita* is preserved in full in London, BL, Additional 34633, fols 206v–18v, and Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, I.81, fols 166v–175r, as well as in an abridgement and three fragmentary copies. Quotations here are from my own critical edition of the text, currently in progress.
- 69 *Vita Milburge*, c. 20; “Flight is straightway prepared, urged, speeded. Indeed the virgin, because she feared the danger more, hurried up the departure more, as much to guard against the staining of her snowy-white modesty as in horror at the coupling of the marriage bed. So she fled from the man, as a dove flees the hawk, longing for the wings of a dove with Davidic longing [Ps. 54:7], with which she might fly to rest, thus to distance herself so as to remain solitary [cf. Ps. 54:8]. A solitary known to no man, a solitary

dedicated to God alone.”

- 70 For an insightful discussion of the way Goscelin wove together a group of biblical metaphors, including this image, see Licence, “Goscelin of Saint-Bertin,” 191–4.
- 71 *Vita Milburge*, c. 19; “To what great heights she was hereafter raised in meditating upon God, and what deep wisdom of the true Solomon she enjoyed through that meditating, I consider it beneficial to describe for you, for imitation’s sake. And may it be a pleasure to you to lend an ear, you who desire to have both meditation and wisdom. By her meditation upon heaven the virgin Mildburh was made into the Lord’s intimate, a second Mary, leaving off with her from the busy sister’s work, sharing her pleasure in blessed rest and the time for contemplation [Luke 10:42], the Lord’s chosen one, the chooser of the best part which will not be taken away from the one who chooses it, nor is diminished in the enjoyment of it. O what a choose-worthy lot, how lovely its enjoyment! ... So as not to be undeserving of mercy from the Lord, and so as not to suffer rejection from the heavenly wedding feast with the foolish virgins, just as I have already said, the learned virgin Mildburh loved wisdom, and acquired it from her youth up. Not the wisdom of this world but that which teaches abstinence from it.”
- 72 *Vita Milburge*, c. 23; “And therefore the spirit of the holy virgin, most devoted to God, took upon herself the feelings and emotions of the psalmist, and having taken them on, made them her own. Thus with him she laboured in continual groanings [Ps. 6:7], anticipating the wrath of the Judge to come [Ps. 6:2], she transfixed herself with fear of God, fearing and guarding against His dread judgements [Ps. 118:120]. Thus with the psalmist’s spirit the virgin’s spirit could not be consoled [Ps. 76:3], so long as she, remaining in the body of death, was obliged to be in exile from the Lord. So with him she ate the bread of grief [Ps. 41:4], so long as the enjoyment of seeing God was delayed for her [Ps. 41:3]. With him also wounded by the darts of heavenly love she was drenched every day with tears of deepest compunction [Ps. 6:7], thirsting for God the living water, like the hart desires the water-brooks [Ps. 41:2–3].”
- 73 Hollis et al., *Writing the Wilton Women*, 23–93.
- 74 Pabst, *Prosimetrum: Tradition und Wandel*, 705–22.
- 75 Hollis et al., *Writing the Wilton Women*, 281.
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 *Ibid.*, 302.
- 78 Just to cite one example, in his *Vita Wulsini* (c. 5): Wulfsige is imagined to emerge from his Lenten retreat, “quasi de cubiculo Domini” [as if from the Lord’s bedchamber], and at the end of the text (c. 25), in the hereafter Wulfsige conducts Juthwara to her Lord, “like the friend of the Bridegroom and the bridesman of the Bride, like the doorkeeper and the custodian of the King’s bridal-chamber” [ut amicus sponsi et paranimphus sponse, ut ianitor et custos regalis thalami]; see Talbot, “The Life of Saint Wulsin.”
- 79 *Vita Edithe*, I: 11; Wilmart, “La légende de Ste Édith,” 5–101, 265–307, at 66; trans. Hollis et al., *Writing the Wilton Women*, 41: “Certainly, whenever

she was at leisure she visited these guests with the mind of a recluse, the friend of the solitude of Antony and Macarius, striving for the part of Mary [Luke 10:42]. The blessed one fled from the uproar of the world, and mingled with the wild animals more safely than with human beings. Christ himself taught this when he spent his forty days with beasts. He was made a wilderness to Israel, and he was found in solitude by his own solitaires.”

- 80 *Historia maior de aduentu S. Augustini*, c. 50; *Acta Sanctorum*, Maii VI:394E: “But that same contemplator on the things of God, as one in flight from the world’s oppression, as a solitary sparrow in the hall, rejoiced greatly with the chains of earthly things broken to fly to the Lord on wings of everlasting love, to take respite in the Mary’s best part, to focus on God alone, to come before the unveiled face of the glory of the Lord, and graze upon His unceasing sweetness.”
- 81 *Vita Amelberge*, c. 26; *Acta Sanctorum*, Iulii III.97A; and compare Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, c. 8, PL 73, 132.
- 82 *Vita Radegundis* (BHL 7048); MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi 4.2 (1885), 38–49; also MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 2 (1888), 364–77, trans. McNamara, Hallborg, and Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 70–105.
- 83 Love, *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin*, cx.
- 84 This is not to deny that there were desert mothers, but rather that written accounts of them seem on the whole to have been less influential for the composition of new lives of female saints, to judge from the lack of explicit references to such women. However, in the third book of his *Liber confortatorius* Goscelin commends Mary of Egypt to Eve of Wilton as an example of patience; see Talbot, “The *Liber confortatorius* of Goscelin of Saint Bertin,” 75; Hollis et al., *Writing the Wilton Women*, 158.
- 85 *Vita Mildrethe*, c. ix; ed. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, 121 [Huius humilitatem, illius patientiam, alterius abstinentiam, alterius uigilantiam, quorundam caritatem et beniuolentiam, mansuetudinem et modestiam emulari decertasset].
- 86 *Vita Antonii* c. 3, PL 73, 128C–129A: “Huius continentiam, iucunditatem illius sectabatur; istius lenitatem, illius uigilantiam, alterius legendi aemulabatur industriam; istum jejunantem, illum humi quiescentem mirabatur; alterius patientiam, alterius mansuetudinem praedicabat.”
- 87 On this topic, see now the excellent monograph by Tom Licence, *Hermits and Recluses in English Society*, with a discussion of Goscelin’s interest in hermits and anchorites at 60–3. I am greatly indebted to Tom for much helpful discussion of eremitism in hagiography prior to the publication of his book.
- 88 Van Houts, “The Flemish Contribution,” 122–3.
- 89 Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, 138, 139.
- 90 Colker, “Texts,” 431: “Huius quoque generis fidelia testimonia non respuenda docet prima et angelica nuncia resurrectionis Domini Maria sanctorumque prophetissarum turba.”
- 91 Hayward, “Spiritual Friendship and Gender Difference,” in Hollis et al., *Writing the Wilton Women*, 341–53.

- 92 The anguished cry “Tu in portu es, ego fluctuo” occurs in Book I (Talbot, *Liber confortatorius*, 35), as does the account of Eve’s consecration (28).
- 93 Gravidal, *Ravishing Maidens*.
- 94 Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint*, 52.
- 95 Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 108: “Valeant qui hec fastidiunt tamquam ad se non pertinentia, dummodo uobis domesticis a Deo date domine dilectoribus sint parata.”
- 96 For the notion of Old English riddles containing sexual innuendo as a means of licitly “viewing” the unmentionable, see Smith, “Humour in Hiding.”
- 97 That medieval women might have entertained such fantasies is suggested by Birge Vitz, “Rereading Rape,” 10.
- 98 *Vita Mildrethe*, c. xxvi; Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 140: “For the God of love came suddenly, the sweet and gentle Lord, the spirit of the Lord Jesus, and, like a river of peace and overflowing torrent [Is. 66:12] and the might of a river bringing joy to his city [Ps. 45:5], with the spring of his love he filled and intoxicated her, and she to whom his mercy had already granted weeping, was able to weep for him yet more fully. To her, as it were baptized in a Jordan of tears, the spirit of the Lord appeared like a dove, whiter than snow, brighter than the sun, and came to rest most intimately on the top of her head. On her head rested the gentlest of birds and the very mightiest of powers. The virgin moaned and the dove soothed his dove. With gentle bill it brought peace, with mildest wings it beat her virginal temples, touched her face and neck with dearest feathers, clasped her whole head in friendly manner. He spoke inwardly to the heart of Jerusalem, and placed sweet whispers and intimate words in her heart, and outwardly with gentle nods like words, it said, ‘Friend, why do you weep? What do you seek? He comes with me to you, and he whom your soul loves is with you. I am your beloved’s love ... You are joined with him, with me as intermediary ... Arise, come away my love.’”
- 99 *Vita Milburge*, c. 22; “My lady, daughter of light, brightest spouse of the True Sun, do not be angry with yourself, do not grieve any longer, that you have been thus unexpectedly startled, struck by a ray of my shining light. Come to your senses and recognize a sign of heavenly visitation, which is shining out for you in me by some angelic ministration.”
- 100 Talbot, *Liber confortatorius*, 28; trans. Hollis et al., *Writing the Wilton Women*, 102–3: “but when indeed ... you approached your marriage with God nervously and second to last ... I was struck more deeply in my heart by your humble habit, your trembling approach, your face, blushing as if from the fiery throne of God sitting above the cherubim ... I was touched by heavenly drops and I wept with an overflowing of fervour.” Goscelin’s account of Mildreth’s consecration (*Vita Mildrethe*, c. xxi) was a direct replaying of this scene. For the likelihood that it was Eve’s consecration rather than her oblation that Goscelin attended see O’Brien O’Keeffe, “Goscelin and the Consecration of Eve.”
- 101 Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 90.
- 102 P.s. 9: 1. *Vita Mildrethe*, c. xxvi; Rollason, *Mildrith Legend*, 139.